

WILD WEST

WEEKLY

A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE

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No. 29.

NEW YORK, MAY 8, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILDWEST'S SELECTION; OR, A MAYOR AT TWENTY.

By AN OLD SCOUT.



Before the man wa
just thrown three
hand for silence. "Three cheers for the youngest mayor ever elected!" shouted Jim
Part. Then the crowd broke into a roar that was deafening. Never had
there been such a demonstration in Weston.

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YOUNG WILD WEST'S ELECTION;

OR,

A Mayor at Twenty.

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CHAPTER I.

BEATEN AT HIS OWN GAME.

"Step right up, gents! I'm Monte Pete, an' I'm called a card sharp. You've got the privilege of beating me at my own game, or you kin stand an' look on, or go by, jest as you please. All I want ter tell yer is that I'm here to make money, an' if I don't make it, I'm goin' to vamoose to some other town. Jest watch ther cards, now! I'll bet ten dollars there ain't a man in the crowd who kin pick out ther queen of diamonds ther first shot."

The scene was a little square in front of the bank in the hustling mining town of Weston, and the time the latter end of the seventies. The individual who called himself Monte Pete, was a bearded man of medium size, whose small black eyes had a way of almost piercing the one he happened to rest them on for a few seconds.

He was a rather flashily dressed man, and carried a belt that was well set out with weapons, and the Mexican sombrero he wore was set far back on his head, giving him a decidedly rakish appearance.

It was a warm day in the fall of the year, and it being just about the time of day that the miners were quitting work to go home to supper, quite a crowd had gathered around the square to listen to him and learn what his game was.

Before the man was a portable stand, and upon it he had just thrown three ordinary playing cards, face down, after showing them to every one who cared to look at them.

The cards were the queen of diamonds, the deuce of clubs and the ten of hearts, and there were those in the crowd who felt sure that they could pick up the queen of diamonds at the first attempt.

But there were others who knew the game only too well, and they simply looked on and grinned.

"There ain't no one among yer that has got sharp enough eyes to foller ther cards, hey?" resumed the gambler, picking up the cards and holding them up so they could be plainly seen again. "Well, I'll chuck them down real slow this time, an' then you can't make a mistake. Now, jest watch me. There they go! Now, who kin pick out ther queen of diamonds?"

"I kin, mister!" exclaimed a tall, thin man, wearing a linen duster and a battered high hat.

He forced his way to the front, and the eyes of the men in the crowd were turned on him.

He was a stranger in the town, as was the man who had opened the game, and he appeared to be so green that the wiser ones looked at him pityingly.

"So you think you kin do it, my friend?" said the gambler, in a good-natured tone of voice.

"Yep! I'll jest bet yer ten dollars I kin, too."

"Well, I'll have to take that bet, jest to amuse the crowd. Remember, now, if you lose you mustn't expect to git your money back, for I don't do business that way."

"I won't say anything if I lose," and the tall man looked toward the crowd and winked.

He pulled out a greasy looking wallet and took from it a

ten-dollar bill that looked as though it had been carried a long time.

"There you are, by jingo! Jest put up, now, or shet up! I'm Darius Winkles, an' I've jest come from thier State of Connecticut, where they grow wooden nutmegs and raise tobacker nineteen foot tall. Cover my ten dollars, now, an' hurry up."

"Oh, I'll cover it, never fear," and with a smile that was "child-like and bland," Monte Pete laid down the money on the table.

"Now, pick out ther queen of diamonds ther first time you try, an' ther money is yours," he added.

"All right, mister," and with that Darius Winkles, as he called himself, turned over one of the cards.

It was the queen of diamonds, sure enough, and with a loud guffaw, he raked in the twenty dollars that laid on the portable table.

"You must have a pair of pretty sharp eyes, I reckon," remarked the gambler. "Now, I'll jest bet you twenty dollars you can't do it again."

"Oh, I guess not, mister. I never bet twice with ther same gent," was the quick reply. "I know you only let me win that time jest to bait me on. But I ain't one of ther sort to be baited. I never go it twice to ther same gent. Why, mister, would you believe it that I've made more'n a thousand dollars since I left ther State of Connecticut in ther same way I jest made this ten? And," he added, with a chuckle, "I made it off jest sich fellers as you be, too."

At this a burst of laughter came from the crowd which was quickly followed by a cheer for the man who said he hailed from "Way Down East."

"That's all right, brethren," he observed, as he drew back to the outskirts of the gathering, which was getting larger all the time. "I've made my ten-spot; now some one else kin have a chance, if they want to."

"That's right," called out Monte Pete, in his far-reaching voice. "Step right up here an' try your luck. Ther Connecticut man in ther yaller duster made his pile, an' I don't begrudge him of it. I won't begrudge anybody of what they win from me."

In every part of the world there can be found men who will try their luck at games of chance, no matter if they know for a certainty that it is a losing game.

And so it was in Weston, Dakota.

A brawny miner pushed his way through the crowd and got in front of the portable table the miner was using.

"Let me see them three cards," he said, and they were politely handed to him.

After examining them carefully he handed them back.

"Go ahead with your game," he said.

The gambler picked up the cards, two in one hand and one in the other.

Then he passed them back and forth before the miner's eyes a few times, so he could see the faces plainly, and then with a quick move he let them fall upon the table, face down.

"Can you pick out the queen of diamonds?" Monte Pete asked.

"I reckon I kin," was the reply.

"I'll bet a hundred you can't."

"I'll go yer."

"Put up your money. Don't touch a card till ther money is up."

Then the miner did what the majority of the people in the crowd felt was a foolish thing.

He went in his pocket and drew out a hundred dollars.

"Who's goin' to be stake-holder?" he cried.

"Put your money right on ther table," and Monte Pete placed a hundred-dollar bill there.

"All right," and the miner promptly covered it. "Now, then, this card are ther queen of diamonds."

But when he turned the card it proved to be the deuce of clubs!

"How in thunder is that?" cried the surprised miner. "I seen you chuck ther queen of diamonds there. I reckon you are tryin' to bamboozle me, mister."

"He not only tried, but succeeded, it seems," said a clear, ringing voice. "Joe Lemperle, I thought you had more sense than to put yourself against that game. You lost your hundred dollars. Now step out and think what a fool you have made of yourself."

"That's right, Wild," retorted the miner, looking very sheepish. "I reckon I oughter have left ther feller alone but I could have sworn that card was there when I turned over the deuce of clubs."

"Of course you could have sworn to it. His hands were quicker than your eyes, that is the reason."

"See here, you young whipper-snapper with ther long hair!" exclaimed Monte Pete, turning to the speaker half angrily, "you've got a whole lot to say: mebbe you think your eyes is quick enough to pick out ther card."

"Well, my friend, I guess they are," was the retort, as a handsome, athletic youth, attired in a fancy buckskin suit, stepped forward. "I guess my eyes are about as quick as your hands, and if you were to put it to the test, you would find that my hands are as quick as your hands, too. I don't know as I said anything that should offend you so. I doubt if there is a man here who is not aware that your game is a swindling one. They will lose money with you, for all that, for there are plenty of men who sometimes get it in their heads that they are as smart as the one who is trying to trick them. There is one thing I would like to tell you, though, and that is, if you came to Weston with the idea that you were going to reap a harvest with this three-card monte game, you are very much mistaken."

"What in ther dickens have you got so much to say about it for?" cried the gambler, in an angry tone. "You had better go home an' tell your mother to keep you in, so you won't git into trouble."

At this the men in the crowd grinned and looked on expectantly.

"My friend," said the youth, speaking as coolly as though he was merely giving a little kindly advice to a child, "no

doubt you think you just gave a good bit of advice to me. Now, I am going to give you a little. It is this: Fold up your table and go somewhere and bury it, and then strike in to make an honest living."

"Who in blazes are you, anyhow?" roared Monte Pete.

"I go by the name of Young Wild West, my friend. Is there anything further you would like to ask before I go home, so I won't get into trouble?"

"Young Wild West, hey? Seems to me I heard some-thin' about you over in Deadwood," and the gambler scratched his head as if he was trying to recollect.

For some reason or other, he cooled down a trifle just then.

It might have been that he had heard that Young Wild West was the champion dead-shot of those parts, and that he had never been known to back down for any one when he thought he was in the right.

"Well, Young Wild West," he resumed, after a slight pause. "I guess we had better see if you are able to pick out ther queen. What do you say?"

"I'll tell you what I'll do," answered the handsome young dead-shot. "I will go against your game with the understanding that if I win you are to quit your game in this town, and if I lose you are to keep it going as long as you please. Is it a go?"

"Yes; I'll agree to that."

"All right, then. Proceed."

Putting on his blandest smile, Monte Pete picked up the three cards.

The miners and cowboys in the crowd surged forward to get a better view, for there was hardly one of them who did not know Young Wild West.

And those who did know him had never seen him beaten at anything he undertook.

The gambler fixed the cards to his taste and then flashed them across the boy's range of vision several times.

He was quite an adept at the trick, and when he dropped the cards on the table there was a look that was half-pitying, half-triumphant in his eyes.

"Now, Young Wild West, which is the queen of diamonds?" he asked, rubbing his hands together as though he was washing them in imaginary water.

"This one," was the calm rejoinder, and the card was quickly turned over.

It was the queen of diamonds, sure enough!

A roar of applause that was intermingled with astonishment went up from the crowd.

The face of the gambler turned several different colors in an instant, and then his sharp, bead-like eyes flashed at Young Wild West dangerously.

But he remained comparatively calm.

"I made a mistake that time," he ventured to remark, as soon as he could make himself heard. "We'll try it over again."

"It isn't necessary to try it over again," spoke up the dashing boy. "You have been beaten at your own game, so stick to your agreement now, and move."

"I guess I'll stay right here as long as I want to!" exclaimed Monte Pete. "This is a public square, an' I'd like to see you try to put me out of it!"

Young Wild West was apparently as cool as an iceberg as he stepped up close to the man.

"Do you remember the agreement you made?" he asked.

"Never mind ther agreement. This is a public square," and to show that he possessed lots of nerve, Monte Pete drew his revolver.

But he had scarcely pulled it from the holster when it was knocked from his hand.

"Don't try anything like that," said Young Wild West, in an easy-going way. "Now, just to prove to you that I always keep my word when I make an agreement, I am going to make you quit your game. Pick up that table and get out of here right away."

"I won't!" and then he made a grab at the boy.

But he missed his calculations by a long ways, and before he knew what had happened he received a stinging blow on the nose.

"That's it!" called out the man in the linen duster, who had called himself Darius Winkles. "Make him stick to ther agreement, young feller. You are ther best I ever seen for yer age. If he goes to hittin' yer back jest make his face look like ther northeast corner of a pigpen that's been struck by lightnin'!"

The majority of those present took sides with Young Wild West.

It had been a plain, matter-of-fact agreement, and the gambler, losing, contrary to his expectations, was not going to keep it.

Some of them were itching to get at him, give him a good mauling, and then break up his table and run him out of town.

But they all had considerable respect for the founder of the town, who was no other than Young Wild West.

They knew he could handle Monte Pete without the least trouble.

But there was a minority there who were opposed to the way the young dead-shot was acting.

They thought he ought to let the gambler go on with his game, even if he had lost.

However, none of them did so much as to express the feelings they had.

Monte Pete was so enraged when he received the blow on the nose that he drew an ugly looking knife and attempted to plunge it in the boy's body.

The attempt was as vain as it was foolish, for the athletic boy caught him by the wrist in a vise-like grip and struck him another blow on the nose which caused him to see stars.

There was not a man in the town of Weston who had as strong a grip as Young Wild West had.

So when he began squeezing the man's arm around a howl of pain went up from him, and he dropped to his knees.

"Are you going to quit your three-card-monte game?" came the query.

"Yes, yes! Let go, won't yer? You're breaking my arm!"

Wild let up on him.

"Now, get out of the square. Take my advice and try to make your living honestly," he said.

Monte Pete was more than satisfied, and picking up his table, he folded it and made a break for the nearest bar-room.

A great many of those who had been in his favor followed him, some of them sympathizing with him as they hurried along.

"Three cheers for Young Wild West!" yelled the man in the linen duster, and they were given with a will.

CHAPTER II.

WILD REJECTS AN OFFER.

Young Wild West, followed by an admiring crowd, walked over to the sidewalk in front of the bank.

"Put her there, Wild!" exclaimed a tall, handsome man with a black beard, and wearing the garb of a scout. "I was waitin' to see some of that gang interfere, an' it's a good thing that they didn't, 'cause if they had, me an' Jack Robedee an' Jim Dart would have flew into 'em like a cyclone."

The speaker was Cheyenne Charlie, the great scout, and he, with the two others he had spoken of, were partners in the quadruple claim with Wild.

Jim Dart was about Wild's age, and Robedee was a man of thirty.

They both stood there, and when Cheyenne Charlie had finished shaking the hand of the boy, they took a turn apiece at it.

The four were almost inseparable companions, though Charlie and Robedee were married men and Wild and Jim were single.

But they both had sweethearts, and meant to marry them when they were old enough.

Arietta Murdock, the pretty granddaughter of the postmaster, had the honor of being Young Wild West's girl, and if ever a maiden was proud of her lover, Arietta was.

Was he not the Prince of the Saddle, champion dead-shot, boss town boomer, and the most handsome and bravest young fellow in the West.

If any one would have said no to this, the fair maiden would have looked on him with scornful pity.

She knew it was so, and how was it that every one who had ever heard of her lover did not?

Jim Dart was engaged to the gentle, sweet-faced Eloise Gardner, who had come to Weston with a show some months before.

The show had broken up, leaving her there in the grip of a fever, and when she became well again Jim found that he had learned to love her.

As the four partners stood on the sidewalk, they made a picture that was pleasing to look at.

They were all athletic in appearance, and naught but bravery, honesty and daring were depicted upon their faces.

"Boys," said Wild, "I am a little sorry that the card sharp made me interfere with him, but I guess we can get along without such people as he in Weston. We have more gambling games in the different saloons than there is any need of, and when it comes to a rank swindling game right in our little square here, it is a little too much."

"I reckon you're right," chimed in Charlie. "You are always right, an' I'd like to see ther man in this town as dares tell you ain't!"

The other three laughed when they saw how earnest the scout was.

"Let's go over to the Gazoo," suggested Jim. "I just saw Joe Lemperle, the man who lost the hundred dollars, go in there, and there goes the man from Connecticut, who won the ten. I have an idea it will be interesting to listen to them as they compare notes."

"No doubt it will," retorted Wild. "Come on. I was going to ask you all to go over and have a good cigar. Today is my twentieth birthday."

"What!" cried the three in unison.

"That's right. It is the seventeenth anniversary of the day I was found on the prairie near the smouldering ruins of a cabin and the bodies of my murdered parents and little sister. It was estimated that I was about three years old at the time, so I have always taken the day for my birthday. I may not be quite twenty, or I may be a trifle older: anyway, I call it my twentieth birthday."

"That's right," answered Jim. "I have got to go nearly three months before mine comes. Well, we will all go over to the Gazoo and smoke the best cigars to be had there with you; and we can listen to Joe Lemperle and the man from Down East at the same time. Come on!"

The crowd had now broken up pretty well, those of the men who had been going home to supper proceeding on their way, and those who hung around the biggest part of the time having followed the card sharp to the saloon on the little street that ran out from the front of the bank.

The hotel called the Gazoo was but a short distance away, and our four friends soon reached it.

It was the best public house in the town, and its proprietor, a man named Brown, was a warm friend of Young Wild West.

It made no difference to him that Wild was a strict teetotaler; he sold whiskey and other fiery beverages, and it was not him to dislike a person because they did not drink what he offered for sale.

There was a pretty good crowd in the barroom when our friends entered, and, as they supposed, Joe Lemperle and the Down Easter had the floor.

"I reckon you was ther wisest hairpin of ther two of us," the big miner was just saying. "You took him up 'cause you knowed he was likely to let ther first one who tried ther game win, an' I took him up 'cause I had an idea

that I knowed somethin' about three-card-monte. You won an' I lost. But it ain't ther first hundred I lost, an' I'll soon make up for it."

"Great corn shucks! But you take it mighty easy over ther loss of a hundred dollars, I must say," cried the Down Easter. "If I'd lost that much I'd worry over it for a week."

"There never was any use in cryin' over spilled milk, you know."

"That's right enough, too. But a hundred dollars is a whole lot of money, gosh if it ain't!"

"That is what is the matter," remarked Wild. "A hundred dollars is not picked up every day, though Joe has a pretty fine-paying claim, for all that. Come on! I want you all to have something with me. This is my twentieth birthday, and I will stand treat."

"Good enough, Wild!" and Lemperle patted him on the shoulder. "My! but you sorter took the starch out of Monte Pete, didn't you? I guess he finds out that he can't do in Weston what he's been in ther habit of doin' in other towns. He didn't have no lame coyote to deal with when he bucked up ag'in you!"

"Say, I'd like to shake hands with you," and Darius Winkles edged over and put out a bony hand that looked as though it might be able to crush a stone.

"Certainly," and Wild grasped his hand.

The Down Easter gave him a pretty tight squeeze, intentionally or otherwise, and then the boy went him one better.

"Gosh! No wonder you made that skunk of a gambler holler!" he observed. "You've got a grip on yer like a corn-sheller! Will I take somethin' with yer? Well, I guess I will! I'll have ther extreme honor an' pleasure of drinkin' a little rum to ther health of Young Wild West, hopin' that he'll live long an' die happy."

"Have what you like," said Wild.

After paying the cost of the round, Wild lighted his cigar and listened to the good-natured talk that was going on.

He noticed that Darius Winkles was a sort of attraction to the men.

Quaint in appearance and quaint in his actions, he could hardly be anything else.

But he was not such a fool as he looked to be.

That had been proved when he took the ten dollars from Monte Pete, and then retired, saying he had enough of the game.

"I wonder what brought him here, anyway?" our hero said to Jim.

"I don't know. I'll ask him, just for the fun of it," and Jim soon got in conversation with the man.

"Are you goin' to stop long in town, Mr. Winkles?" he asked.

"If I kin strike a small-sized gold mine, I am," was the reply.

"Well, there is plenty of gold around these diggings. I ~~give~~ you are lucky enough to strike a good-paying vein."

"~~Buy~~, you fellow, won't show me where there's a good place to take out a claim, will yer?"

"Well, I will show you what I think would be a good place. I can't guarantee how much dust you will find there, or I won't say that there is any. I only know that there has been millions taken out of this vicinity in a short time, and I am sure that there are millions more waiting to be taken out."

"Gosh!"

The man's eyes sparkled, showing only too well that he was an aspirant for riches.

"I suppose you came out here to try and strike a gold mine?" went on Dart.

"Yes; that's what I come for. But I've done so well on ther way out here, winnin' money from fellers what took me to be a regular squash, that I was thinkin' seriously of jest travelin around an' makin my pile by beatin' card sharps at their own game."

This remark caused a laugh to go up from all hands.

"You would probably find that business wouldn't last a great while. You would surely get the worst of it in the end, for there are plenty of men who would not hesitate to put you out of the way for what they knew you had won."

"Gosh! I guess that's right, too. I never thought of that before. Say!" and he turned to Jim again. "Will you show me where you think would be a good place for me to stake out a claim to-morrer mornin'?"

"Surely I will."

"Good enough! I reckon I'll stay right here in Young Wild West's town for awhile, then."

"See here," said Wild, "you must not call this my town. I will admit that I had something to do with boozing it along, and that is what named it after me, but it might make some folks jealous to hear it called my town."

"Jest as you say, sir. But I'll be everlasting goshed if it don't look as though you could have a lot to say about how ther place should run, if you had a mind to. I'm a putty good judge of human natur, if I was raised on a farm, but when I seen a good sight more than half ther men in ther crowd side with you when you was talkin' to ther gambler, I made up my mind you had ther controllin' interest in ther town. I'll bet a cartload of punkins that if it came to a vote as to who was ther most-thought-of person in ther town, you'd win with hands down."

"Thank you for your complimentary talk. It don't do me any harm, or it don't do me any good. It has never come to a vote yet to see how much I am thought of. But it make little difference what people think of me, so long as I know that I am on the right track and have the satisfaction of knowing that I am trying to do all the good I can in the world, and helping those who are willing to start anew as I go along."

"Blazes!" cried Winkles. "You ain't a Sunday School teacher, are you?"

"No. I never acted in that capacity yet," and our hero smiled at the man's question.

It was now pretty close to sunset, and when he looked at his watch and found that it was getting past supper time, Wild suggested to his partners that they go home.

All agreed on this, so when Jim had told Darius to call at the office of the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company in the morning, they wended their way homeward.

Wild and Jim went to their bachelor quarters and Charlie and Jack hied to the neat little cottages they lived in just at the outskirts of the town.

The two boys found that their Chinese cook had a fine meal waiting for them, so they sat down and did full justice to it.

Shortly after dark, when Young Wild West had just settled himself comfortably in a chair and picked up a book, there came a knock on the door.

Jim went out to see who it was, and a minute later he ushered Monte Pete in.

"Good evenin'!" observed the card sharp, fixing his piercing eyes on those of our hero with a questioning stare.

"Good evening," answered the boy, rising. "What can I do for you, Mr. Monte Pete?"

"I thought I'd come an' see if I couldn't square things with you. I'll jest give you one-third of what I make if you'll let me have plain sailin' with my three-card-monte game in this town for a few days."

The words were scarcely out of the gambler's mouth when Wild caught him by the collar of the coat and swung him around to the door that opened into the hall.

"Just open the front door, Jim," he cried; and Jim hastened to obey.

"Wha—what is the matter?" demanded Monte Pete in surprise.

"I'll show you what is the matter," was the retort. "When a man tries to bribe me he is barking up the wrong tree. I consider it a big insult, what you just said to me, and I am going to throw you out of the house! Now, then, away you go!"

Wild got the fellow on the run, and when he reached the stoop he kicked him with the flat of his foot and sent him rolling over and over on the ground.

Monte Pete had just imbibed enough liquor to make him ugly and reckless, and as soon as he could scramble to his feet he pulled his shooter and began firing it at the front of the house.

"Stop that!" commanded Wild, from the door. "Stop it, or I'll drop you dead in your tracks!"

The fellow must have realized that Young Wild West meant just what he said, for he at once stopped shooting and ran away from the house.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jim Dart. "But didn't you send him flying off the stoop, Wild? I had no idea that you was mad at first."

"Well, I don't know as I would have got mad if it had been some fellow I had never seen before. That fellow must be crazy to come here and make such a proposition, after what happened in the square before supper. Trying to bribe me, eh? I wonder if some one didn't send him here?"

"I don't know who it could have been, unless it was Ben

Bailey, the proprietor of the place he went into after you broke up his game."

"Well, I know Bailey don't like me, but I hardly think he would send him here to make such a proposition as that."

"You can't tell about that. I heard it remarked over at the post-office the other day that Bailey had said he thought you could be bought as well as any other man. He said you were a fanatic on trying to run things straight in Weston, and that the people at large put altogether too much confidence in a mere boy."

"Oh, he did, eh? He don't like me because I advised him that he had better run things straight in his saloon. I told him that the morning after the stranger was found dead at his back door. That stranger had a big roll of money when he stopped at the Gazoo before he went in Bailey's place, and the next morning when he was found dead he hadn't a cent. I honestly believe that he met with foul play in Bailey's, and I did at the time. I don't suppose the hint I gave Bailey struck him very gently. That is why he is down on me. I wouldn't be much surprised if he did put it in the head of the card sharp to come over here and offer me a bribe. That would have been a big thing for Bailey and the men of his stamp to shout around about me, wouldn't it?"

"It certainly would," Dart answered. "Well, I guess they know now that you can't be bribed."

"See here, Jim, do you know I am just in the humor to take a walk over to Bailey's place. Come on; we'll go."

"You are not going to say anything to Bailey, are you?"

"No; I shan't mention a thing about Monte Pete's visit. If the card sharp is there, he won't have anything to say. I guess it would be a good idea to get a line on the people who hang out in that place, anyway. Come on. Get your hat and coat on, and we will go over."

"All right," was the reply, and five minutes later the two were heading for the hotel that was run by the man Bailey.

Young Wild West had not lost his temper, but he wanted to try and find out if Monte Pete had really been sent to him.

And he was going to find this out without starting any kind of a muss.

CHAPTER III.

THE PROPOSED ELECTION.

There had been much discussion about the way things were run in Weston at Bailey's hotel since the trouble between Young Wild West and Monte Pete.

This happened to be the place the card sharp hid to as soon as our hero let him go, and it so happened that he could not have struck a better place to get sympathy extended to him.

As has been stated, those in the crowd who had been satisfied to see him remain in the square and keep his game open had followed him to the saloon.

"Things are gettin' worse an' worse here in town, I think," Bailey remarked, when he had heard of what had happened. "It is gittin' so that after awhile a man won't be allowed to run a poker game in his place, without he asks ther permission of Young Wild West first. I don't see how it is that ther people of this town don't get to work an' elect some one that would be ther choice of ther people for mayor. Ther town is altogether too big to be run ther way it is. If I had lived here as long as some of you fellers have I bet we would have things runnin' ther same as they are in other places of its size."

"Gee-whizz!" cried the man who kept the meat market that adjoined the saloon. "That little speech hits ther mark nearer than anything I've heard in a good while. Boys, there ain't ther least reason why we can't hold an election here an' have ther town run under a regular form of government. Why, all we have got to do is to git about half a dozen of the leading citizens to sign their names to a call. Then we kin meet an' nominate a candidate an' app'int a day for the election to take place."

The suggestion struck every one as being a good one.

There were two or three warm friends of Young Wild West there, and even they were favorable to what the butcher said.

The butcher's name was Larry Spooner, and though he spent a great part of his time in Bailey's saloon, he was a man pretty well thought of by the residents of the town.

"I nominate Larry Spooner for mayor!" called out one of the enthusiastic miners. "He'd be jest ther man for ther place. Old Dove-Eye Dave, who has been a sort of actin' mayor so long, is too old for ther place, anyhow."

"An' he goes to Young Wild West for advice every time he wants to do anything, I have heard," added Bailey.

"Larry Spooner would be the man for the office," spoke up another. "But what is he—a Republican or a Democrat?"

"I ain't nothin', so far as politics go," retorted the butcher, who seemed to be pleased at what had been said about him.

"Good enough! We don't want any politics in ther game," remarked another party.

There was a lot more said on the subject, and the more they talked it over the more the men in Bailey's place became convinced that they ought to elect a mayor who would work things to suit them.

It was finally settled that Larry Spooner, the butcher, was to draw up a sort of call for a meeting the next afternoon and bring it to the saloon after supper.

Then a committee would be appointed to go around and get a dozen good citizens to sign it, after which it would be posted in the post-office.

Spooner went right home to draw up the paper, the mayoralty buzzin' in his ear as he went.

Monte Pete had been much interested in the talk.

"I reckon I'm ther cause of all this," he observed. "Give me a mile whiskey, landlord."

"Well, it is just ther thing what ought to have been done

long ago," Bailey retorted. "I'm somewhat of a newcomer here, or I'd have started up ther game before. Now, that Larry Spooner has got interested in it, you kin bet it will amount to something."

"An' when you elect your mayor maybe I kin do business in ther square out there, hey?"

"I reckon you kin."

"Say," and the card sharp leaned over in a confidential way. "Don't you think if I was to offer this feller Young Wild West a third of what I could make, he'd be willin' to allow me to go ahead with my game?"

"I don't know but you are right on that," was the landlord's reply. "I have always had an idea that all he was layin' for was a little money. I reckon he kin be bought, jest as well as any other man."

"Blamed if I ain't goin' to see him an' try him."

"I would if I was you. He wouldn't stop you from workin' ther game, only you agreed to, an' now I s'pose he wants to be paid before he'll let you go ahead without kickin' up a rumpus. I'd go an' see him, if I was you."

"Where does he live?"

"You could see ther house from here if it wasn't dark. Anyhow, you turn ther corner an' walk straight till you come to ther first turn to ther left. Then you'll see ther office of ther Wild West Minin' and Improvement Company, an' right back of that is ther house where Young Wild West lives."

"I guess I kin find it all right. I'll go over there putty soon. I'd rather go ahead without any one ag'in me in my game; so if Young Wild West is lookin' for a share of ther profits, I'm willin' to give him one-third. You see, by his not sayin' anything ag'in it would make all ther more business for me."

"That's right," and Bailey nodded as though that part of it had just struck him.

Monte Pete did go to see Young Wild West, as the reader knows.

When he came back to the saloon, he was in anything but a pleasant frame of mind, and the rather natty rig he had on was in a bedraggled state.

"How did you make out?" queried Bailey.

"I got thrown out!" was the reply.

"You did?"

"Yes."

"He wouldn't have it that way, then?"

"No. I don't think a million dollars would buy him to do a thing he didn't want to do. That's my opinion of Young Wild West. But I'm goin' to git square on him before I leave town, see if I don't."

"Tell me all about it."

Monte Pete did so.

"Did treat you rather bad, didn't he?"

"Yes. Say, that boy has the strength of an ox, do you know that?"

"I have heard he is little short of being wonderful."

"Well, he ain't short of it a bit. He is wonderful."

"Well, I never had anything to do with him in that line," and Bailey shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, never mind. I'll fix him before I leave Weston. I s'pose you'll let me run my game here to-night for half of ther profits?"

"Yes; I don't mind if I do. It ought to be a good time to-night, 'cause there will be a lot in here as soon as this 'lection business gits reported around."

The card sharp then called for something to eat, and while the landlord had gone to the kitchen after it, the door opened and in walked Young Wild West and Jim Dart.

Monte Pete felt very nervous when he saw them, but as they paid not the least attention to him, he soon plucked up courage and put on a bold front.

Wild and Jim walked up to the bar, and pretty soon Bailey came out with a sandwich for the gambler.

He showed no little surprise at seeing Young Wild West in his place, but when our hero called for the best cigar the house afforded, he lost no time in waiting on him.

There were about a dozen men in the room at the time, and two or three were very friendly to Young Wild West.

They spoke to him pleasantly, as they did to Jim, also.

"Did you hear ther latest?" asked one.

"No. What is it?" queried Wild.

"They are goin' to issue a call to hold an election for town officers, ther same as they do in other towns."

"Oh, is that so? Who is going to head the thing?"

"Larry Spooner, the butcher."

Our hero glanced at Jim, showing no little surprise.

He knew that the butcher was quite a popular man, and anything he took an interest in was liable to go through.

"Well, I don't know but that would be a good idea," he said to the man, and he really thought it would.

Before anything further could be said on the subject the door opened with a rush and in came Spooner with a dozen enthusiastic citizens at his back.

"Listen, people!" shouted the butcher, as he moved beneath the lamp that was hanging over the bar and drew a document from his pocket, "here's the call for a meetin' to be held to nominate town officers to be voted for at a day to be decided on later. Now, all of you keep still for a minute, an' I'll read ther call."

He did not notice who was in the room, but went right ahead and read as follows:

"Whereas, the town of Weston is rapidly growing, and is in need of a regular form of government, instead of the way it is run now, it is hereby

"Resolved, that we, the undersigned citizens of Weston, do and hereby demand that a meeting of the citizens shall take place at Bailey's Hotel, Wednesday evening, October 27th, for the purpose of deciding when an election can be held, and setting a day for same; and be it further

"Resolved, that the following officers be nominated for election: A Mayor, a Clerk, a Treasurer, a Justice of the Peace, and two Constables; all of said offices to be filled by the candidates for same receiving the largest number of

votes, to take office the day following the election and hold the same for one year; and be it

"Resolved, that all candidates not nominated at this meeting must each have the endorsement of at least twelve citizens who do not take part in this meeting, otherwise they will not be considered as candidates, and should there be any ballots cast other than the regular nominees they shall not count; and be it further

"Resolved, that we, the undersigned, make this call, thinking it will greatly benefit the town of Weston by adopting these resolutions."

A cheer went up from the men in the barroom when Spooner finished reading the resolutions, and when it had subsided the butcher and two other men pretty well thought of in town set out to get signers, after first affixing their own signatures.

They got three or four to sign, and then Bailey handed the paper to Young Wild West.

"Go ahead an' sign it," he said. "It makes no difference whether you are twenty or not."

A sudden thought struck Wild.

"If you will put a clause to the effect that all male residents of the town over eighteen years of age will be allowed to vote at the election, I will sign it," he answered.

"And so will I," spoke up Jim.

"Good enough!" cried Spooner. "We'll do that with pleasure, won't we, boys?"

"Sure!" came the answer.

"There are several young fellows in town who are not twenty-one who should be allowed the privilege of voting," said a man named Jacobs, who, by the way, was a friend of Wild.

"Well, all in favor of adding that clause to the resolutions say aye."

"Aye!" came the unanimous retort.

That settled it, and the butcher added the following to the document:

"And be it further:

"Resolved, that all male residents of Weston, eighteen years of age or over, be allowed the privilege of voting and to enjoy all the rights and benefits of the same, as if they were of legal age, at the election, and also at any nominating meeting that may be held."

Our hero then unhesitatingly signed his name to the paper, and Jim Dart did likewise.

Spooner was delighted at this act on the part of the two.

"Now I know ther thing will go through!" he cried. "Anything Young Wild West signs his name to is bound to be a success. Hooray, boys! Now let's see how many names we kin git to this paper."

The self-appointed committee went out, and in less than an hour they returned with an even fifty signatures to the call.

The notice was then hung in the post-office, and from that moment the greatest excitement prevailed in the town.

Wild and Jim did not stay in the place till the committee got back.

They knew the move would go through, so our hero suggested that they go over and see Dove-Eye Dave, who had been a sort of acting mayor since the town had been first instituted, as he had been the first to settle there.

They found the old pioneer at his home.

He had not heard of the set of resolutions being adopted, and when Wild told him about it he jumped from his chair and uttered a whoop.

He seemed to be delighted.

This was contrary to what the boys expected, as they thought he might feel a little put out about it.

"A better thing couldn't have happened!" he cried. "Why didn't some one think of this before? Jerusalem, Wild! Put your hand right there!"

He shook the hand of the young Prince of the Saddle with such earnestness that it looked as though he had suddenly gone crazy.

"I am glad you are satisfied," Wild ventured to remark.

"Satisfied! Well, I should say so. Why shouldn't I be, my boy? It is you who will be ther mayor of Weston! You will, jest as sure as a wild cat kin climb a tree! You say that all male residents of the town are goin' to have ther same privilege, so long as they are over eighteen. You are over eighteen, I should reckon, an' that gives you ther privilege of runnin' for mayor."

Young Wild West had not thought of anything of the kind, and he did not think such a thing advisable.

He wanted to have a vote, so he could try and get a good man elected, but he thought it should be a man of more mature age to take the office of mayor of the town.

"Don't get any such idea as that in your head," he said. "I don't want to be mayor, even if I could be elected. Let that part of it drop. We will look around and find a good man for the office."

"Yes! I'll let it drop. Jest wait till to-morrow morning. I'll let it drop," and the old man chuckled as though he had struck the best thing out.

"See here!" exclaimed Young Wild West, speaking a little sternly, "I want you to promise me one thing."

"Mebbe I will, an' then mebbe I won't. I allus want to oblige you, Wild, but there's exceptions sometimes."

"Well, I want you to promise that you will not mention my name in connection with the office of mayor until after the nominations are made to-morrow night."

"What do you want me to promise you that for?"

"Well, it is my wish."

"I s'pose I'll have to give in to you, then. I won't say a word till ther day after to-morrow, then, Wild."

"All right. I shall hold you to that promise. By that time there won't be any need of mentioning my name for the office."

The old man looked at him in an injured way.

"Keep your promise, now," the boy insisted. "If you don't, I will never forgive you."

"Oh, I'll keep it."

There was a tinge of doggedness in the man's voice, though, that Wild could not understand.

The boys left Dove-Eye Dave a few minutes later and went out to tell Cheyenne Charlie and the rest of their intimate friends about the proposed election.

And they meant to call upon their sweethearts incidentally before they went home.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CAMPAIGN OPENS.

The next morning things started in with a hum in Weston.

The arrival of Monte Pete had been the means of stirring up the greatest excitement the town had known in some time.

And the strangest part of it all was that everybody seemed to be satisfied with the idea of holding an election.

Larry Spooner, the butcher, had announced himself as a candidate for mayor the night before, and though he was quite popular with the majority of the voters, there were those who thought they ought to have at least two candidates in the field.

If there was only one to vote for the election would be a very tame affair.

Brown, the proprietor of the Gazoo, was a well-known and honest citizen, so about nine in the morning he consented to allow his name to go on an opposition ticket.

Then the friends of both began to hustle.

When night came there was such a crowd in Bailey's hotel as had never been there before, and when the meeting started every one there was enthused with delight and a large part of them with whiskey.

But that only made it more interesting.

The resolutions were adopted unanimously, and then it was moved and seconded that the nomination for the several offices be made.

At this one of Brown's henchmen got up and proposed that all those who favored nominating Brown for Mayor follow him.

The consequence was that nearly half the men promptly left the place and went over to the Gazoo.

Then Young Wild West left the meeting also, and when he went out a whole lot more went with him.

But there was a big crowd left yet, and the nominations went right ahead.

Larry Spooner was nominated for mayor by acclamation, and when he set up drinks for the crowd there was great hurrahing.

The rest of the ticket was soon filled from the many aspirants to office present, but they got little attention.

The mayor seemed to be the only office the men cared for.

While they were making merry over the nominations they had made at Bailey's, another crowd were busy putting an opposition ticket in the field.

Brown got the first place on the ticket, and the rest was quickly filled, Dove-Eye Dave being honored with the

nomination for treasurer, and Sam Murdock, the post-master, as Justice of the Peace.

The next morning the campaign opened with a vim.

The two candidates for the office of mayor met and it was left to them to appoint a committee to get the printing done and to select three responsible men to act as inspectors of election.

Young Wild West was appointed on the committee to see about having the tickets printed, and then Cheyenne Charlie, Joe Lemperle and a man named Lew Rollins were selected as the inspectors.

Then, after a little wrangling, during which almost every one present had something to say, it was decided that the election should be held on the following Tuesday, and that the polls would open from sunrise till sunset.

The voting was to be done in the barber shop, and the barber was to get fifty dollars for the use of it from the successful candidate for the office of mayor.

Wild agreed to see about having the tickets printed, and when he got a list of the names on the two tickets they read as follows:

"Mayor, Larry Spooner and Alvin Brown; Clerk, Erastus Smith and Norman Ladd; Treasurer, Bill Billings and Dove-Eye Dave; Justice of the Peace, Hank Jimson and Sam Murdock; Constables, Tom Gibbs, Fuller Warren, Red-Eye George and Gimpy Gil."

Two sets of tickets had to be printed, of course and they were to be on the same kind of paper with the endorsement, "Weston Election," on the outside.

Young Wild West knew exactly what was wanted, and he set out on the first morning train that left for Spondulicks after he had been appointed the committee to have the printing done.

He had no sooner gone than Dove-Eye Dave began to let himself loose.

He had about the name of every man who had not attended either of the two nomination meetings, and he went from one to the other and whispered a few words to them.

And he received a favorable nod each time.

The result was that shortly after noon about thirty men assembled at the post-office for the purpose of making a third nomination for the office of mayor.

Dove-Eye Dave being the oldest resident of the town, it fell to his lot to be the chairman of the meeting.

"Boys," he said, as he got upon a chair, "I have called you here for the purpose of nominatin' another candidate for mayor. I ain't got a single word to say ag'in either Brown or Spooner personally, but it sorter struck me that seein' Brown is ther keeper of a hotel, he ain't exactly ther right sort of a man to be mayor of this town. We want a man who will do his best to make a clean an' model town of Weston, an' as rum causes about all ther deviltry an' sich like, that's goin' ther rounds, it won't hardly do to have ther keeper of a whiskey mill for our mayor. Then there's Spooner, ther butcher. While he don't keep a whiskey mill, he takes in one about half his time; so I don't think he'll do, either. I am going to nominate a man who is only a

boy, my friends an' feller citizens. I nominate Young Wild West for mayor of Weston!"

Then such a yell of approbation went up that the rafters in the building fairly shook.

The majority of his hearers were smiling at what the old man had said about "the man who was only a boy," when he spoke the name of Young Wild West, and they immediately forgot the funny part of his speech and cheered as they never had before.

"For Mayor, Young Wild West!"

That was the battle-cry now, and as soon as the unanimous choice of the meeting made Wild their candidate, the men went outside and shouted themselves hoarse.

In less than a minute the news reached the ears of Brown and Spooner.

They could not have been more astonished if an electric shock had struck them.

But it only made them both more determined to win the day when the polls got open.

Young Wild West was very popular, but he was only a boy, and that surely would be very much against him.

Brown soon got so that he laughed at the thought of Young Wild West running for mayor.

He was beginning to regard it as a joke.

But Spooner and his sponsors took it more serious.

Bailey, the saloon-keeper, expressed himself in very savage terms about the handsome and dashing young Prince of the Saddle.

"If he gits elected, he'll close up every whiskey mill," he said.

"That would be a good campaign slogan," remarked Monte Pete. "Jest go around among ther drinkin' class an' let 'em know that if ther boy gits elected, he's liable to close up every place in town. That'll make him lose votes enough to bring him at the tail end, even if he is very popular. A man what wants his whiskey, wants it, an' he ain't goin' to vote for a feller what's in favor of takin' it away from him."

"By jingo!" exclaimed Bailey. "I believe you're right. I'll see Spooner about it to-day, an' we'll git some transparencies an' banners made."

"That's it. I don't know much about this town, but I've been here long enough to know that Young Wild West seems to have things pretty much his own way. I don't know how it will be in an election, because he's only a boy. But in everything else he generally gits there, so I've heard."

"Yes: that's so. But he won't git there this time. It's votes what'll count this trip, not flashin' eyes an' cool words an' revolvers."

"Well," remarked the card sharp in a low tone, "Young Wild West does git elected, I'm goin' to shoot him an' light out of town so quick that they won't find a hole in hair of me. I'm goin' to do it jest to git square on him for ther way he used me."

"I wouldn't talk like that if I was you," said Bailey. "It don't sound good, an', besides, if it was to get out that you

sod that you'd be a marked man, an' Young Wild West would gain lots of votes by it."

Bailey did not like Wild much, but he was not the one to think of using foul play toward him.

Still there is no doubt that he would have rejoiced if it came to his ears that the boy had died suddenly.

Larry Spooner came in a few minutes later.

He had met Dove-Eye Dave as he came out of the post-office, and had learned all about the new ticket.

"Well, I guess there is going to be a hot three-cornered fight," he remarked, as he reached for his favorite bottle. "Ther Independents, as they call themselves, have nominated a whole ticket. They wasn't going to do this at first, but Dove-Eye Dave said that some of them thought it would be ther best thing to do, an' then they would have less trouble in sortin' out ther ballots when they counted 'em. They've got some pretty good men on their ticket, too, an' they won't hurt it a bit. Here's ther Independent candidates, and he read the following:

"For Mayor, Young Wild West; for Clerk, Rex Moore; for Treasurer, Dove-Eye Dave; for Justice of the Peace, Sam Murdock; for Constables, Jim Hill and Dave Johnson."

"Well, that is quite a ticket, ain't it?" remarked Bailey. "Dove-Eye Dave an' Sam Murdock are on two tickets, hey? Well, they might stand a putty good show of gittin' elected."

"It's likely they will be elected. But maybe if Smith an' Billings git out an' do some tall hustlin' they'll beat 'em, even if they are on both tickets. I'm goin' to do my level best for ther whole ticket. We've named ours ther People's ticket, an' that's what it is."

"We're in favor of a livin' for everybody an' no tetotalism," added Bailey.

"That's it."

"Young Wild West ain't, though."

"Well, he ain't much in favor of liquor, I reckon," and the People's candidate for mayor scratched his nose thoughtfully.

"Of course he ain't. He'd close every place in town if he got ther chance, an' if ther people elect him they'll give him ther chance."

"Well, they mustn't elect him. Gee-whizz! I'd rather see Brown win than him."

"So would I; but Brown can't win. He's ther rankest candidate of ther lot, ther temperance folks think, 'cause he runs a 'whiskey mill.'"

"An' I'm a butcher," laughed Spooner.

"An' Young Wild West—what kin he be called?"

"Ther Prince of ther Saddle, I suppose. But say, Bailey! How is this, anyway? Has Young Wild West said he would accept ther nomination? He wasn't home when he was nominated; he went over to git ther tickets printed, you know."

"Go, ther chance are that he knows all about it. I think he had an idea of runnin' when he got us to add ther clause

in ther resolutions that allowed fellers under twenty-one to vote."

"Gee! I guess you are right. I never thought of that before. Well, it is too late now. He's goin' to run, if he wants to, an' all I say is that I'm goin' to do my level best to come out at ther top of ther heap. I've got a little money, an' I'm goin' to let it fly 'Lection Day."

Bailey nodded and smiled.

He was thinking of the harvest he was going to reap on that day.

The campaign had opened in earnest now, and many of the miners gave up all thoughts of work till after the election.

Half a dozen came in Bailey's place while he was talking to Spooner.

They were arguing at a great rate, and two of them were the candidates for the office of constable on the Independent ticket.

Jim Hill and Dave Johnson were their names.

The farmer had always been a red-hot democrat and the latter a rock-bound republican, but they were united in their views now because they were both on the Independent ticket.

Jim Hill was a miner with a pretty good "gift of gab," as Dove-Eye Dave put it, and Dave Johnson was an old army scout who claimed he knew more about politics than all the men in Weston put together.

When they talked the matter over between them they came to the conclusion that their ticket could not lose.

It might have gone under if they had not been put up on it.

Both felt certain that Young Wild West was going to win with hands down, even if the rest of the ticket did go under, and they were doing no small amount of shouting about it when they came into the saloon.

Johnson ordered drinks for all hands, and then pulled a chair in the middle of the floor and assisted Hill to get upon it.

Hill was going to make a speech.

Spooner's adherents tried to cry him down, but they might as well have tried to stop a windmill with a feather.

"Gentlemen," began Hill, "I'm here to say a few words in behalf of ther smartest, brightest, quickest, honestest, straightest, loyalest and best young feller that ever lived. I refer to Young Wild West, an' he's goin' to be ther mayor of Weston, an' don't you forget it! He'll have enough votes to carry him through with bells on, 'cause ther people know they kin trust him. I ain't sayin' a word ag'in ther other candidates—I know they are honest men, an' good ones, too. But how could a voter go back on Young Wild West? He's done more for this town than any ten men, an', gentlemen, you all know that I'm speakin' ther truth. Who give ther town its first boom? Young Wild West! Who cleaned out ther road agents? Young Wild West! Who built ther railroad from here to Spondulicks? Young Wild West! Who started ther bank? Young Wild West! Who built ther schoolhouse? Young Wild West! Who's ther best

rifle or revolver shot in ther West? Young Wild West! Who's ther dandiest rider that ever straddled a horse? Young Wild West! Who believes in doin' good, first, last an' all ther time, to his fellow men? Young Wild West! Who's goin' to be elected mayor of Weston? Young Wild West!"

That was all Jim Hill could say, for he allowed himself to get so excited that Johnson thought he was in danger of bursting a blood vessel.

He shouted so loud that every word had been heard distinctly, in spite of the efforts of the Spooner crowd to drown him out.

And the three or four supporters of Young Wild West joined in letting out a yell that made the butcher almost feel that the election was over, and that Young Wild West had really won.

But there was not one present who was not willing to admit that Jim Hill was using a mighty strong argument.

When Hill and Johnson left to go over to the Gazoo Larry Spooner breathed a sigh of relief.

CHAPTER V.

WILD ACCEPTS THE NOMINATION.

Cheyenne Charlie, Jim Dart and Jack Robedee were of course present at the meeting which nominated Young Wild West a candidate for mayor.

To say that they were delighted at the move would be putting it too mild. They felt like shouting over it.

They remained at the meeting till the whole ticket was made and then Charlie, who had been appointed to see to it that the Independent ticket was to be printed along with the other two, said he was going to Spondulicks at once.

"I'll go by train," he added. "I don't like to go anywhere without my horse, but this is a case that has got to be attended to right away, as Wild will give ther order he went over with an' then come back."

"He won't be back till night, I reckon," retorted Jack. "My wife was tellin' me that Arietta said he was goin' to buy her a present when he went over, an' that when he come back to-night he would come right over to ther Murdock house an' take supper with 'em."

"He told me he was goin there to supper," Jim spoke up. "Of course that means that he won't be home until the train that gets here a little before six. Charlie, if you have no objections, I'll go over to Spondulicks with you."

"Objections! Well, I reckon I ain't got none. You come an' go, too, Jack."

"I can't," answered Robedee. "I promised Martha to take her over to spend ther night with Rugged Pete an' his wife. We're goin' to go over with ther stage at two o'clock, an' we won't be back till to morrer night."

"All right. See if you can't drum up some votes for Wild over there," laughed Charlie.

"I reckon we'll be able to drum up enough right here in Weston to elect him," was the reply.

"We can't be too sure about that," said Jim. "You must remember that this is an independent ticket of ours, and we will have to hustle in a three-cornered fight."

"That's all right. Wild can't be beat, an' that's all there is to it."

Charlie and Jim now made hurried preparations to take the next train for Spondulicks.

They knew they would have no trouble in finding Young Wild West when they got there.

If he was not at the newspaper office they could learn where he was at the hotel he always stopped at when he was over there.

They had not a minute to spare when they boarded the train.

Cheyenne Charlie had the Independent ticket written in a plain and neat hand by Rex Moore, the bookkeeper of the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company, and candidate for clerk of the town.

"I wonder what Wild will say when he hears that we've nominated him?" he remarked as he leaned back in his seat and lighted a big, black-looking cigar.

"He will be surprised, no doubt," replied Jim. "And I suppose he will want to get out of it."

"But we won't let him git out of it."

"No. It is about the greatest chance he ever had to show the people of Weston what he is made of. He may think that it is pushing him ahead a little too much, on account of his not being of age, but we will soon talk him out of that notion. Why, look how the men acted when it was proposed to them! Wild is very popular, and if he should decline to run he would not be doing his duty."

"Of course he wouldn't. Oh, I guess me an' you kin soon git any such notion as that out of his head. Old Dove-Eye was pretty shrewd, too, to wait till he was gone before he called ther meetin'. Ther old feller ain't so dumb as some people think he is."

"He was the starter of it, anyway, and Wild's nomination has taken like wildfire. But we must not allow ourselves to run away with the idea that his election is a sure thing. Both Spooner and Brown are popular men, and if they should get a little more than half the vote, where would Wild be?"

"He'd be beaten in that case. How many votes are there in Weston, anyway?"

"I don't know exactly, but I suppose there must be all of seven hundred. Dove-Eye is going to meet with the heads of the other parties this afternoon and then a canvass will be made to find out just who is entitled to vote. I suppose there will be trouble when the election comes around, and as you are one of the inspectors, you will have your hands full. You will have to keep your eyes open, too, for there is no telling but that there might be some crooked work done."

"I'll look out for the interest of Wild every time. I don't want a vote counted for him that he ain't entitled to."

"An' we ain't goin' to let Brown or Spooner have any counted that don't belong to 'em. If they try to do anything like that there'll be blood spilled before the election is over, jest as sure as my name is Cheyenne Charlie."

"That's right!" and Jim's eyes flashed, showing that he heartily agreed with the sentiments of his companion.

The run to Spondulicks was soon made.

When our two friends got out they promptly headed for Ryan's hotel, which was the best place in town.

As they had not taken time to eat anything before leaving Weston, they were hungry, and they thought they might as well have dinner there.

When they entered the door they were agreeably surprised to see Young Wild West just going to the dining-room.

"Hello!" called out Cheyenne Charlie.

The boy turned around as quick as a flash.

"What are you fellows doing over here?" he asked, showing no little astonishment at their unexpected appearance in Spondulicks.

"We came over on a little business," said Jim, with a laugh.

"The business must have come up pretty sudden after I left Weston, then."

"It did," and Charlie and Jim both laughed then.

Wild was not a little puzzled at their manner, but he decided to say nothing more about it.

He would let them tell him why they had come there when they got ready to do so.

"Haven't you had dinner yet?" queried Jim.

"No. I stayed over at the printing office longer than I expected to. It is now three o'clock, but I am no less hungry for waiting."

"Well, I reckon we are in ther same fix," observed Cheyenne Charlie. "We ain't had nothin' to eat since breakfast."

"Well, come right in the dining-room, then. I guess there is enough there for us all."

"If there ain't I'll soon have it put there," spoke up the proprietor. "Step right in, gentlemen. Folks from Weston are always welcome here. How are you all, anyhow?"

"Fine."

"I'm glad to hear it. We've got roast wild turkey and ruffled grouse stuffed with chestnuts to-day for you to feed on. Git right in, now, an' make out you was home."

The three needed no second invitation.

They were as hungry as bears, and a couple of minutes later they were seated at the big dining table, which they had all to themselves, since it was past the regular dinner hour.

"Well," observed Charlie, when the dinner was well under way, "did you order ther 'lection tickets printed, Wild?"

"Yes," was the reply. "They will be done and delivered Saturday night. I also ordered some big posters for old man Murdock and Dove-Eye Dave. They will be done in a couple of hours, and I intend to take them with me."

"Well, I reckon you had better take a walk over to ther

printin' office with us as soon as we git done. We've got to have some printin' done, an' we want it done quick."

"What are you going to have printed?"

"They thought they would not have enough ballots for the election, so Dove-Eye Dave sent us over to get some more printed," Jim answered.

"Oh!" and Young Wild West seemed to be satisfied that he had learned what their mission to Spondulicks was.

"An' while he was at it, we thought we'd git some big bills with ther name of our candidate for mayor on 'em," added Charlie.

"Have you fellows decided on which of the candidates you are going to support for mayor, then?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I haven't, then. Of the two men, I like Brown the best, but I can't say that I would like to see him mayor, for all that. He is a hotel proprietor, and that is against him. Not that a hotel proprietor is any worse than any other business man, but he would be apt to discriminate, I think. He would have to be in favor of letting every man who wanted to start a saloon, and I think we have enough of them in town now. Then there is Larry Spooner. He is a fine man when he is sober, but he does not stay sober as much as he ought, not by a good deal. I can't say as I will vote at all yet. Who are you fellows in favor of?"

"You!"

"What do you mean?" Wild exclaimed, rising from his chair.

"We mean that we are going to vote for you for mayor," Jim answered, coolly. "You were nominated on an Independent ticket shortly after you left Weston this morning."

The face of Young Wild West turned slightly pale.

"I don't like this, boys," he said slowly. "But I can see through it all now. Dove-Eye Dave is at the bottom of it."

"Yes; he is at the bottom of it, but there are a whole lot at the top of it. Wild, you are going to win the election."

"I guess not. I—"

"You can't get out of it. You have got to run. If you don't you will make a majority of the people in Weston sore on you."

"And if he does run—"

Cheyenne Charlie checked himself.

"He will make the minority sore on him," added Dart, with a laugh.

Young Wild West resumed the eating of his dinner without a word.

Then Jim told him the whole thing, and just how matters stood.

But even then he would not say that he would accept the nomination.

"Come!" exclaimed Charlie, when they got up from the table, "have you made up your mind yet?"

"No."

"You haven't?"

"No."

"Well, come over to the printing office with us, anyhow."

"What for?"

"We want to give the order for the ballots for ther Independents. Even if you back out, ther rest what's on ther ticket won't."

Wild made no further objections.

It was not altogether a surprise to him, after all, as the way Dove-Eye Dave had talked made him think that the old man was going to urge his candidacy.

But when he had been appointed on the committee to have the ballots printed, he had not dreamed that it was a put-up job to get him away, so they could go ahead and nominate him.

Half an hour later they walked over to the printing office.

"Ah!" exclaimed the editor of the "Weekly Sentinel," which was printed there. "Mr. West, you are just the one we want to see. I have just learned that you have been nominated for mayor of Weston on the Independent ticket. As you left the order here not long ago for the ballots to be used at your election, it struck me as being rather strange when the news was brought in here a few minutes ago."

"It is true," spoke up Jim Dart before Wild could open his mouth. "He was nominated, and we have come to order the tickets printed."

"I must say that I hardly know what they have been doing in Weston since I left this morning," said Wild to the editor. "I—"

"I understand it," laughed the editor. "They have sprung a surprise on you. Well, such a nomination cannot be declined, I should think. I will have a good article about it in this week's *Sentinel*."

"That's right," spoke up Charlie. "Here is the copy for the other ballots we want. They must be on the same kind of paper as the others an' with ther same endorsement on ther outside."

The boss printer came forward and took the copy.

"And while you are at it, we want a couple of hundred of ther biggest bills you kin print," went on the scout. "We want to take 'em back to Weston with us to-night, too."

"I don't know about getting them done as soon as that," and the printer shook his head.

"We have got to have 'em, no matter if you have got to let ther other bills Wild ordered to-day go. There ain't much to go on 'em, anyway. All's you need put on 'em is: 'For Mayor, Young Wild West.' Put ther name in ther biggest letters you've got in your shanty, an' you'll git five dollars extra for ther job."

"Here," interposed our hero, "I guess you had better not print those bills till I make up my mind about taking the nomination."

"You've got nothing to say about this, Wild," answered the scout, with mock seriousness in his voice. "I reckon I'm ther committee on this business."

The Prince of the Saddle was being talked to as he had never been before, and it quite got the best of him.

But he saw how useless it was for him to say anything, so he very wisely made no further objections, and the order was given to the printer, just the same as Charlie intended to give it.

When they came out of the office a few minutes later, after receiving the promise that the posters would be done at five o'clock, Jim suggested that they go and see a show that was playing in town.

It was a sort of museum and variety show, and Wild readily agreed.

The position he was placed in was a strange one, and he wanted a chance to think it over.

He could go to a show, and if there was not much to interest him there he could think the matter over.

The show happened to be a pretty good one, and the three got so much interested in it that they forgot all about the coming election for the time being.

When they came out it was pretty close to five o'clock, so they went over to the printing office and found the posters just being wrapped for them.

Charlie insisted on paying the whole bill, and he had his way about it.

Then, after being assured that the three sets of ballots would be sent over by a special messenger not later than Saturday night, they went to the depot and took the train for Weston.

Wild received the congratulations of many when he got in the car, and he began to think that his nomination was a very popular one.

When they got to Weston, Wild and Jim went direct to the Murdock house, as they had promised, while Charlie went to the post-office with the posters.

"Good evening, Mr. Mayor," said Arietta, when our hero entered the house. "Allow me to congratulate you on your nomination."

"What! Are you getting crazy, too, Et?" he asked.

"Getting crazy!" she cried. "Why, I am the proudest one in all Weston."

"Do you mean that, little one?"

"Mean it, Wild! Why do you ask such a question? Of course I mean it. The people want you for mayor, and they are going to have you, too. All the best men in town will cast their votes for you next Tuesday."

"Well, if you talk that way, too, I suppose I will have to accept the nomination."

"What! You don't mean to tell me that you were thinking about refusing to run!"

"Well, I was strongly inclined that way. You see, Et, I wanted to see you first and see what you thought about it."

"Well, I say run, then."

"That settles it. I will run, and I will do my best to be elected."

CHAPTER VI.

SPOONER MAKES A MISTAKE.

As soon as Dove-Eye Dave received the posters he sent them out through the town without loss of time.

The Independent party was the first to announce their

nominees in that manner, and the old man was of the opinion that a big advantage had been gained.

Though his name was on every one's lips and many were anxious to meet and congratulate him, Young Wild West did not show himself that night.

He stayed at the Murdock residence until after ten and then went home, accompanied by Jim.

But the next morning he felt that he must make the rounds of the town, especially when he heard how the two candidates for the offices of constable were electioneering for him.

Jim Hill had been going it all night, and he had made at least fifty speeches, all of which contained about the same words.

"But," as Cheyenne Charlie put it, "it was all the truth, so the more he talked about it the better it would be for the young candidate."

Wild had now entered into the campaign with that degree of earnestness that he went into anything.

There were five places in the town where whiskey was sold, and he felt that he must show up in all of them, as he could not hope to be elected without the votes of the men who frequented such resorts.

In all mining towns like Weston the drinking places are where the miners can be found when not at work or in their homes.

In the days of which we write there was a great degree of lawlessness in the Black Hills, and Judge Lynch usually settled the cases of all horse thieves and other law-breakers.

If a man got shot in what was called a "square deal," nothing was thought of it, and the undertaker simply took charge of the body and buried it, taking for his recompense what money could be found in the pockets.

Of course if the unfortunate man had friends who were willing to pay the expense it was different.

His personal property then went to the town.

As has been stated, Young Wild West had done much toward bringing Weston to a higher level than the usual places of its size in that part of the country.

He tried to make people live honest lives, and that was why he had a great many enemies.

And these same enemies feared him as much as they hated him.

His fearless and dashing way and his true and quick shooting made him a terror to evil-doers.

Wild mounted his handsome horse, Spitfire, and rode over to the post-office about nine o'clock on the morning after his return from Spondulicks.

He had been told that the Independents were to meet there and settle on how the campaign should be conducted.

He found all the candidates there and many more—in fact, there was such a crowd that half of them could not even get to the door of the post-office.

When they saw him coming the cowboys and miners broke into a prolonged cheer.

Wild took off his hat and bowed right and left.

It was the first time that he had ever been greeted under

such circumstances, and for the first time he felt a little proud over his position.

It was a great demonstration that the rough but honest men made.

When it had calmed down a trifle the young Prince of the Saddle thanked them for the nomination in a few well-chosen remarks, not leaving the saddle.

He told them that he was going to do his best to be elected, and that if he should be elected, he would do his best to make Weston the model town of the West.

That was all he thought was necessary to say, and it struck them as being that way, too.

He could say no more without becoming egotistical, and that was a thing that he had never been guilty of.

A meeting was then held by the executive committee and the candidates, and it was quickly decided that the short campaign should be run strictly on the merits of those seeking the offices.

Of course they were to win all the votes they could by fair means.

And they were to look out that their opponents got theirs in the same manner.

After the meeting was over the candidates started to make a round of the town and canvass for votes.

Wild figured on it taking them the best part of the day to do this properly, for he did not intend to miss a single voter, if he could help it.

The hotels and saloons were to be visited as they came to them.

The start was made at ten o'clock, beginning at the house adjoining the post-office on the left.

Our hero knew that the majority of the miners would not be at home, but he also was aware of the fact that they would appreciate being waited upon, even if they were not at home.

And their wives would also appreciate it.

It was a great scheme.

The tediousness of it was not to be thought of.

In just half an hour the candidates had reached the Gazoo, the first hotel on their route.

Brown was there as was a big crowd of his henchmen.

They were drinking and making merry, and the candidate was standing the expense.

"Hello, Brown!" called out Young Wild West, as he entered. "We are making the rounds, so we did not want to miss you. I have a pretty good opinion of you, but my friends have made me get it in my head that I would make a better mayor than you, so I am hustling for votes."

"That's right, Wild," the proprietor answered. "Don't for a moment git it in your head that I'm sore on you for acceptin' ther nomination on ther Independent ticket. I felt like withdrawin' from the race, but my friends won't let me. If I can't git elected, I want to see you git ther place. That's from my heart, Young Wild West, an' you kin believe it or not, jest as you please."

"Well, Brown, I have never caught you telling an untruth, so I believe you. Give the boys what they want on

me, with the understanding that I am going to take a cigar myself."

About two-thirds of those present took drinks and the rest took cigars.

This was pleasing to the young candidate for mayor, for he was certain that some of those who took cigars would vote for him.

They remained in the Gazoo about ten minutes and then resumed the round they were making.

They did not miss a single house, and pretty soon they came to another hotel.

There was quite a crowd in here, too, and when Wild had done the same as he had done in the other place and found that nearly half of them took cigars, he felt that he was making pretty good headway.

And so they kept on, not missing a store of any kind or a private house.

Two more places where liquor was sold were visited with result that just suited Wild.

It was about an hour later when they struck Bailey's place.

There was a very big crowd there, and Larry Spooner was "setting 'em up" for the boys in a reckless manner.

He happened to catch sight of our hero as he entered the door.

"Hello, Young Wild West!" he cried. "You are jest in time: Have a Spooner drink, won't you? Everything is Spooner around here, you know."

"Well, Mr. Spooner," answered the boy, with his usual frankness and easy-going style, "if I was to take a Spooner drink I would have to take whiskey, so I will have to decline your invitation. I'll take a Young Wild West drink, which will be ginger pop in here. If you feel like paying for it, you can."

"What do you mean?" cried the butcher, who was just enough under the influence of liquor to get mad. "You didn't mean that to insult me, did you?"

"No; I did not. I only took you at your word. Isn't that a glass of whiskey you have before you?" retorted Wild, not appearing to notice that the man was mad.

"Yes; it is whiskey; but whose business is that?"

"Yours, sir."

"Then what are you bothering your head about it for?"

"I am not bothering my head about it, Mr. Spooner, but I think that if you drink that glass full many more times it will bother your head. Now, don't get mad. We are both candidates for mayor, and you drink whiskey and I drink ginger pop. Here is hoping that you will get out and hustle for votes and make a good showing on Election Day."

"Aha!" roared Spooner, getting into a rage. "So it is true that you are taking the temperance side of it, then? Well, Young Wild West, I just want to tell you that your time of running things as you please in Weston is pretty near up. You have made a fool out of a good many men, but next Tuesday we will make a fool out of you."

"That is something that remains to be seen," was the

calm retort. "Mr. Spooner, you are getting excited. Take my advice and keep cool."

"See here, Young Wild West, if it wasn't that I know you are very handy with a shooter, an' would drop me in a minute, I'd just take you by ther back of ther neck an' snap your heels together."

"You surely don't mean that, Mr. Spooner?" and the young candidate for mayor took a couple of steps nearer to the angry butcher.

"Yes; I do mean it. Confound it all! you are altogether too meddlesome in things that don't concern you a bit. Look at Monte Pete ther other afternoon! What harm was he doin' you, or any of your friends? You jest broke up his game because you thought it was smart, didn't you?"

"Never mind about Monte Pete, Mr. Spooner. I want you to take me by the back of my neck and snap my heels together. I have never told you a lie, have I?"

"Well, no," and the man began to cool down a trifle.

Young Wild West was now thoroughly aroused, though his manner did not show it to any great extent.

"Well, then," said he, "I give you my word that I won't use a shooter on you, so go ahead and take me by the back of my neck and snap my heels together. Do it quick, now, or I'll stand you on your head in the corner over there!"

The last was said with much emphasis, and Spooner turned pale as he realized the big mistake he had made.

He knew full well that Young Wild West was a dangerous one to tackle at any game, but his temper had caused him to say what he did, and he would have given a great deal if he could only withdraw the remark he had made.

He looked all around till his eyes finally lighted on the face of Monte Pete, who stood at the end of the bar.

That villain gave a slight nod, and acting on the suggestion it meant, the butcher made a sudden grab for Wild to make good his threat.

But he made a miss of it.

Instead of gripping the boy by the shoulder he received a blow between the eyes that sent him staggering backward.

Then, before he could recover himself, Wild made a quick move and caught him about the waist and whirled him from him.

The butcher struck the floor with a bang, and then Monte Pete rushed at Wild with a knife uplifted to plunge it into his body.

But old Dove-Eye Dave kicked the weapon from his hand before he could use it, and then covering the villain with his revolver, ordered him to hold up his hands.

Meanwhile Wild was not paying the least attention to any one but Spooner.

The man had scarcely struck the floor than he had him by the ankles and lifted him straight upon his head.

A corner of the room was close by, and using his knee for a fulcrum, the boy threw him over to it.

"I am going to make you stand on your head in that corner, and I am not going to use my shooter to do it; if you don't do it I am going to give you the worst thrashing you ever had in your life."

These were the words that rang in Larry Spooner's ears just then.

He was but a coward, after all, and realizing that Young Wild West would be certain to keep his word, he allowed the boy to place him in the position he wanted him in.

"Now don't you dare to come down till I tell you to!" Wild exclaimed.

"Hurry up! I can't stand it very long!" cried the man, while a roar of laughter went up from the men in the bar-room.

"Gentlemen," said Wild, "that is a fine position for a candidate for mayor to be in, isn't it? Get down, Spooner; I guess you have had enough. Take my advice and don't drink any more until after election. You are not responsible for your words and actions just now. I'll forgive you for them."

The butcher, who had been straining every muscle in order to keep himself in the unpleasant position, rolled over to the floor with a grunt of relief.

Monte Pete stood in the center of the room, staring at the muzzle of Dove-Eye Dave's revolver, his hands over his head.

Nearly everybody else in the place was smiling or laughing outright.

"Let him be, Dove-Eye," said Wild. "I guess he is harmless enough. If he don't mind his eye, though, I think the newly elected mayor will have to give him twenty minutes to get out of town, if he is here yet. Give every one what they want, Bailey. I am going to take a cigar myself."

Then, much to the surprise of the barkeeper, fully three-fourths of the men took cigars.

And when they lit them they all nodded in a friendly way to Young Wild West.

Monte Pete slunk off to the back of the room as soon as Dove-Eye Dave lowered his revolver.

Evidently he was glad to get off so easily.

"I'm goin' to take a nap, boys," spoke up Larry Spooner. "I reckon Young Wild West was right when he said I didn't know what I was doin'. I'm goin' right home, an' when I git straightened up I'm goin' to git out an' hustle to git elected. Young Wild West, if I ain't lucky enough to be ther winner in ther three-cornered fight, I hope you're. That's all I've got to say jest now, 'cept that I don't bear you any grudge for what has happened here. I'll see you later."

"All right, Mr. Spooner," was all our hero said.

Then he paid his bill at the bar and went out, followed by his friends.

"If what happened just now could only git in ther Spondulicks paper it would be great," chuckled Cheyenne Charlie. "Rex Moore, can't you write something about it an' end it over?"

"I don't think it would benefit our side any to do that," replied the candidate for town clerk. "Some people might think Wild was in the wrong by bothering with a drunken man, and he might lose votes by it."

"That's right," spoke up our hero. "Any one to understand it would have to see it. A newspaper article would not explain it good. Let it drop. I don't want to make capital of it, but I couldn't help handling Spooner that way; he made me mad."

"If ever a fellow was served right, I reckon he was," chuckled Cheyenne Charlie.

"And he took it so meekly, too," added Jim. "He certainly did look comical standing on his head in the corner."

"Who stood Spooner on his head? Young Wild West!" roared Jim Hill, catching up to them. "Who's ther whitest feller in Weston? Young Wild West! Who's ther man who's goin' to win ther 'lection? Young Wild West!"

Hill had been drinking just a little too much, and Wild took him to task and told him to leave out the Spooner incident.

He promised to, and then the rest of the trip around town was made without anything out of the ordinary happening.

Altogether, it had been a great triumph for Young Wild West.

CHAPTER VII.

THINGS BEGIN TO GET REAL WARM.

Saturday night the printed ballots came over from Spondulicks.

It was decided by a committee composed of one from each of the parties in the field that they should be held in the bank until Monday night.

Then each of the three would take the package of ballots that represented his candidates and have the privilege of distributing them, if such was the desire.

Realizing that there would be many of the ballots wasted, Young Wild West had ordered one thousand each of the People's and Citizen's tickets.

And when Cheyenne Charlie placed the order for the ballots with the names of the Independent candidates on them he ordered a like amount.

That made three thousand ballots with only about seven hundred men to vote.

The population of Weston was about eleven hundred and fifty.

Fully seven hundred of these were males of the voting age, according to the resolution, and the rest were women and children.

Some of the miners were in favor of letting the women vote, but they were howled down in short order.

The sides of every public place, and the fronts of some of them, were covered with posters now.

A stranger would have been very much interested if he had come in town and looked at the assortment of names glaring at him in big type.

Probably the most amusing of the posters was:

"A vote for Red-Eye George means a vote for good government. If he is elected he will guarantee to arrest the man the Justice of the Peace sends him after. Vote

for Red-Eye George on the Citizen's ticket for Constable."

Another poster read:

"For Justice of the Peace, Hank Jimison. If you elect him he will deal out justice in the right way, or know the reason why."

The rest simply contained the candidate's name and the office he was running for.

Monte Pete was still in town, and when the committee from the People's candidates returned to the headquarters at Bailey's hotel with the information that the tickets were not to be given out till Monday night, the card sharp showed signs of disappointment.

He was sitting at a table with Bailey when the committee came in, and they both had been expecting that the ballots would be delivered right away.

"How is that?" queried Bailey of the man. "Why couldn't we have our ballots to-night?"

"Well, there was three of us there, an' when ther other two decided that Monday night was ther proper time to git 'em, what was ther use of me sayin' any different? Ther majority rules, you know."

"Yes; ther same as it will Tuesday," said Monte Pete, with a chuckle.

The man who had brought the word in did not linger but a few minutes.

He saw that the two were evidently talking in private, so he excused himself and went out.

"It is too bad we couldn't get ther tickets," said Monte Pete.

"Yes; that's so. But I s'pose it will do jest as well Monday night, won't it?" was the reply.

"Well, they might be watching us closer then. I've rigged it so ther stuffin' of ther ballot box kin be done, though, in case we find we are likely to git beat."

"You have, hey?"

"Yes; I got Lew Rollins, one of ther inspectors, to consent to do ther trick this mornin'. He didn't want to, but when I told hiim there was a couple of hundred in it, he agreed. Spooner needn't know anything about it. He seems to want things to be square, an' I'm afraid he won't stand a very good show if they are. You want to see him elected 'cause he is a good customer an' a friend of yours, an' I want to keep Young Wild West from bein' elected 'cause I want to git square on him. I meant to do him ther other night, an' I'd surely have done it if it hadn't been for old Dove-Eye Dave."

"Yes; you'd have done it all right, but where would you be now if you had done it? Out in ther cemetery at ther foot of ther bluff."

"I s'pose so," and the card sharp shrugged his shoulders.

"No s'posin' about it. That's where you would be, jest as sure as you are alive this minute. If you'd stnek your knife in Young Wild West when you made ther move to do it, you'd been dead before you struck ther floor. That Cheyenne Charlie would have had thtee bullets in you befoe you went down, outside of what ther rest would have went into you. You kin consider yourself a lucky man that

you got off so easy. I thought sure they was goin' to fix you, as it was. If it hadn't been for Young Wild West himself, they would have, too."

"Well, I'll fix him before election's over, see if I don't. If I find that he's goin' to git ther most votes, he's got to die!"

"I wouldn't, if I was you. I wouldn't try no killin' game, 'cause if you do you'll surely git ther worst of it, mark my words for that. You jest help me to beat him out of the election, that's ther way to git square with him."

"Oh, I am going to do that, anyway. What I know about sleight of hand will fix it, I guess."

"How are you goin' to fix it so's Spooner will git ther most votes, anyway, if we can't bribe enough to vote ther marked ballots?"

"You leave that to me; I'll fix it. I have made arrangements to do it with Rollins, ther inspector."

"Are you two going to do it alone?"

"Well, come to think of it, a third party will have to be in it. I reckon you'd be jest ther man."

"Well, I don't mind takin' a hand if there ain't no danger of gittin' caught. You know it would ruin my business if I was found to be mixed up in anything like that."

"Well, you couldn't be caught in this. It is ther easiest thing in ther world. I seen it done in 'Frisco, where there was two policemen watchin' ther countin' of ther votes, an' no one ever dreamed that there was anything crooked going on, though every one was surprised at ther way ther election turned'out."

"Tell me how it is goin' to be done."

"Well, when ther count begins, you an' I must be standin' right close to ther inspectors. Rollins will have his dog there, an' after he gits a hundred of straight tickets counted out with ther name of Young Wild West on ther top he will lay 'em down, right where ther other inspectors kin see 'em, of course."

"Yes; but what then?"

"Well, I'll have a hundred of our tickets under my coat."

"Yes," and the hotel proprietor looked expectantly.

"When Rollins says to ther other inspectors, 'There's just an even hundred in this pile!' you must kick his dog, and kick him real hard. Then I'll make out ther dog has bit me, an' in ther excitement that'll be bound to foller I'll pass my bunch of ballots to Rollins an' he'll give me ther hundred of Young Wild West's. Then I'll go limpin' out, an' we'll be just two hundred votes ahead of ther game."

"I see!" ejaculated Bailey. "It is a great scheme, and I don't see how it kin fail to work. But you said we would be two hundred votes ahead of ther game, when we will be only one hundred."

"It'll be two hundred, I tell you."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, Young Wild West will lose a hundred, won't he?"

"Yes."

"An' we'll gain a hundred, won't we?"

"Yes."

"Well, won't that make two hundred?"

"By jingo! I never thought of that."

"An' I guess that will be enough to do ther business."

"Oh, yes, plenty. I reckon fifty would be enough, but I s'pose we kin put in a hundred of 'em jest as easy. Ther only trouble there'll be about it is ther dog. S'posin' he ain't right where I kin git a kick at him at ther proper time?"

"It is ther business of Rollins to see that ther dog is in ther right place. That's what he's goin' to git two hundred dollars of Spooner's good money for, though Spooner don't know it is goin' to be used that way."

"Oh, he thinks it is to be spent to git out ther voters that ain't decided how they are goin' to vote. Well, by jingo! Monte Pete, I think you are about ther slickest feller I ever met. If we don't make Young Wild West an' his gang sick Election night, I'll be ther most surprised man in Weston."

"That's what's the matter."

"An' are you goin' to do all this jest to git square on Young Wild West?"

"Well, not exactly. I want a favor done before I go into this thing."

"A favor? What is it?"

"I want you to git Larry to promise me in writin' that if he is elected I kin have ther free use of ther town to work my skin games when an' where I please on public property."

"Oh, I guess I kin git him to do that easy enough. Hello! Here he comes now."

"Not a word to him about ther scheme, now!" cautioned the card sharp.

Spooner came into the back room just then.

He was perfectly sober, having taken the advice of our hero, and he was doing his level best going around the town and bidding for votes.

He was spending a whole lot of money, too, and spending it needlessly.

"Hello, Mr. Mayor!" called out Bailey, grinning as if he was getting off a very smart thing. "Sit down. You are jest ther man we want to see."

"How are you, boys?" retorted the butcher, showing that he was pleased at the title that had been bestowed upon him. "I reckon you are a little too soon in calling me Mr. Mayor, but I hope you will be able to do it for fair Tuesday night when ther votes are counted."

"We will be able to, all right," nodded Monte Pete.

"You think so? Well, it is too bad that you have not been town long enough to have a vote."

"If he can't vote, he's doin' you a pile of good," spoke up Bailey.

"So I have heard."

"I'm an old hand at politics," said the gambler, speaking as though he hardly cared to admit it. "I have been interested in many hard-fought elections, an' my side never got lost."

"An' you are doin' your level best for me, are you?"

"Yes; I am goin' my whole length for you."

"Well, keep it up till ther votes are in, an' I'll remember you in case I git the office of mayor."

"Say, Spooner," spoke up Bailey, "you'd be willin' to give Pete a written promise that you wouldn't interfere with him in runnin' his monte game around town, if you got elected, wouldn't you?"

"My written promise? Ain't my word good enough?"

"Well, I've always seen promises made by candidates made before election given in writin'," Monte Pete answered.

"You mean ther ones that was kept, don't you?" spoke up Bailey.

"Yes, of course."

Spooner grinned at this.

"That's quite a joke, I guess," he said. "Well, I'll give you that promise, Pete. Give me a pen an' ink an' paper."

The landlord soon got the required articles and the butcher wrote out the promise.

Monte Pete placed the paper in his pocket with a look of deep satisfaction.

"Now, you'll win, anyhow!" he exclaimed.

The butcher then led the way out in the barroom and treated all hands, and after getting a cheer from his ardent supporters, left the place.

Monte Pete went out soon after to hunt up votes, he told Bailey.

As a number of shiftless fellows had promised to vote marked ballots for a small consideration apiece, he thought he had better hunt them up.

These men were not to get payed till after the count.

If the marked ballots came out in accordance with the agreement they made they were to get the money.

It was a novel way to win an election, but such frauds have been worked successfully all over the country.

It was just about an hour later that Bailey was standing behind the bar, lauding his candidate for mayor to the skies to a couple of miners who seemed to lean toward Young Wild West, when the door opened and Spooner came rushing in all out of breath.

"Confound it all!" he cried, bringing his fist down upon the bar with a bang that made the glasses jingle. "I had no business to give Monte Pete that written promise."

"Why, what's ther matter?" asked Bailey, in surprise.

"Why, ther confounded fool must have lost it, an' some one has found it an' give it to Brown. He's got an enlarged copy of it pasted on a bill-board in front of his place an' is usin' it as a campaign document."

CHAPTER VIII.

WILD GETS SOME VALUABLE INFORMATION.

Young Wild West had just gone over to the Murdock residence to make a call before going home Saturday night, when Charlie came rushing in with rather a gleeful look on his face.

"Come take a walk over to the Gazoo!" he exclaimed. "There's somethin' over there that's worth seein'."

"What is it?" asked Wild.

"Oh, one of Brown's friends picked up a letter, or somethin', that Larry Spooner wrote to Monte Pete, ther card sharp, an' some feller, who is pretty smart at letterin', has enlarged it on a big piece of paper, an' they've got it pasted up on a bill-board in front of ther hotel. Brown thinks Spooner is a gone goose now."

"Well, I guess I'd better go over and see it," our hero retorted. "How about it, Jim?"

"Certainly," replied Dart, who was in the other room, listening to Charlie's remarks. "We can't afford to miss that."

Putting on their hats, they left the house with Charlie, after promising the girls that they would stop long enough to say good-night on their way back.

As they neared the Gazoo they saw that a large crowd had collected in front of it.

Whooping and yelling was going on at a great rate, and every second or so a burst of laughter would ring out.

Our three friends quickly pushed their way through the crowd until they got near enough to see what was causing all the excitement.

Pasted on a rudely constructed bill-board that stood right at the side of the door of the barroom, was a big sheet of manilla paper with the following inscribed on it in heavy black letters:

A CAMPAIGN DOCUMENT!

The People's candidate for Mayor makes a promise.

This is a copy of what was picked up in the street tonight (Saturday). The original written promise is in the possession of Alvin Brown, the Citizens' candidate for Mayor, and can be seen on application.

Read Spooner's promise to Monte Pete; it speaks for itself.

Here is the full text of the written promise:

"If I am elected Mayor of Weston on Tuesday next, I agree to give Monte Pete the privilege to run his three-card-monte game, or any other game he wants to run, in the public streets and squares of the town whenever and wherever he wants to run them, daylight or dark."

"(Signed)

LARRY SPOONER."

The largest oil lamp the hotel afforded was placed so the light would shine directly on the flaming poster, and both Brown's adherents and those of Young Wild West were full of glee.

They knew that Spooner would lose many votes from the writing of such a promise.

Although the majority of the men liked to gamble, there were very few of them who took any sort of a notion to Monte Pete.

"That's what I call great, ain't it?" said Charlie to Wild.

"Well, it does look rather bad for Spooner, I must say," was the reply. "He ought to have known better than to write such a thing, even if he contemplated giving any such privilege if he got elected."

Our three friends now pushed their way inside the hotel.

Brown was behind the bar, laughing all over his face.

"Hello, Wild!" he called out, as he caught sight of our hero. "What do you think of Spooner's chances now?"

"It looks bad for him, I should say, but you can't always tell."

"I reckon you kin tell putty good, though. Want to see the original letter?"

"Well, yes; I suppose it is a sort of curiosity."

Brown handed it over, and our friends soon saw that it was genuine.

"Well, Spooner can make all the promises he has a mind to," observed Wild, as he handed the letter back. "I am not making any, beyond what I have said in public that, if elected to the office of mayor, I will try and run the town in a creditable manner."

"An' I ain't makin' any promises, either," retorted Brown. "Ther people know me pretty well, an' if they want me for mayor, they'll find they didn't make any mistake in votin' for me. Ah! What's this?"

Spooner and Monte Pete came surging into the barroom, both glaring like angry wildcats.

"Where's that letter?" demanded Spooner, angrily.

"Where it will be kept safe till after election," retorted Brown, coolly.

"Give it to me!" cried Monte Pete. "It is mine!"

"I'll give it to you after election."

"Tear it up!" howled Spooner, getting into a terrible rage. "Don't give it to anybody, but tear it up!"

"I'll keep it till after election," was Brown's calm retort.

The butcher went on at a terrible rate, but he managed to refrain from making any threats, or calling his opponent any bad names.

But Brown was obdurate; he would not give up the letter.

Finally Spooner calmed down a trifle.

"I'd jest like to lay eyes on ther galoot that wrote that stuff that's on ther bill-board outside," he said.

"All right, mister," said a voice from the door of the back room. "I'm ther feller what fixed up your political death warrant. What do you want of me?"

All eyes turned toward the door, and out stepped Darius Winkles, the Down Easter, who had beat the card sharp at his own game the day he started to do business in the square.

The appearance of the man was entirely unexpected to Spooner, but when he heard him acknowledge that he had lettered the poster, he lost control of himself, and pulling his revolver, raised it to shoot Winkles in his tracks.

But Young Wild West knocked the weapon from his hand.

"You forget yourself, Mr. Spooner," the boy said in his usual calm voice. "Go home, now. Before Tuesday you may be able to think of a way to get back the votes you lost by writing that promise."

Spooner cooled down instantly.

"Good-night, all!" he cried, as he made a bolt for the door.

Monte Pete followed him, knowing full well that it was no place for him in there.

But if Spooner was satisfied to go away peacefully, several of his followers were not.

That poster was an insult to their candidate for mayor, and they decided that it must not stay there.

A couple of the more reckless ones began firing at the objectionable evidence, and in less than five minutes the bill-board was being riddled, and the front of the building, as well.

Wild saw that there would be a regular riot if the Brown contingent attempted to stop them, so he called the proprietor aside and advised him to call his men in and let the Spooner gang do as they pleased with the campaign document.

Brown lost no time in acting on this advice.

The result was that the butcher's friends carried what was left of the bill-board away in triumph, the only casualties being one man shot in the arm through a mistake.

"They've had their way to-night," said Brown, as our friends were leaving. "But jest wait till 'Lection Day! I'll have Darius Winkles to make a bigger poster than that was, an' I'll put it up an' have a dozen men guardin' it with rifles. Spooner ain't goin' to get elected, an' that's all there is to it. An' ther next time he comes in here with blood in his eye he's goin' to git a bullet, so he'd better keep out. His friends, if he has any here, had better tell him that."

Wild laughed.

"You fellows can get excited if you want to," he remarked. "As for me, I am not going to lose any sleep over the election. Good-night."

"Good-night," answered Brown, and then they stepped out into the street.

As they were passing the bank a miner came running up to Wild.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I want to tell you something."

"What is it, Quigley?" the boy asked, as he recognized the man.

"I heard that Monte Pete buyin' a man's vote about an hour ago, an' I thought I would tell you about it."

"How was he tryin' to buy the man's vote?"

"He told him he would give him a ballot with a crease in ther left corner of it, and that if it come out of ther box when ther count was made he would git ten dollars."

"So that is the game that is being worked, is it?" observed Wild. "I didn't think Spooner was the sort of man to go into any such a crooked deal as that. Well, we will have to keep an eye on a ballot with a crease in the left corner of it."

"Oh, there'll be lots of 'em, I guess," the miner went on to say. "Monte Pete told ther feller that he expected to have fifty men to vote ticket like it. Rollins, ther inspecto, is goin' to keep tab on ther ballots an' see if they come out right, an' then if they do, ther money is to be paid to them men with their votes over at Bailey's place as soon as

ther count is over, an' whether Spooner is elected or not. That's ther agreement."

"Well, Quigley, I am much obliged to you for your information. We will be on the lookout for the ballots with the creases in them. Here is a fifty-dollar note; you can make use of it to electioneer with, but don't buy anything worse than whiskey with it. I don't wish any votes to be bought for me. If I can't win the election honestly, I don't want to win at all."

"Thank you, Young Wild West. I'll take this money, 'cause I may be able to keep some of ther gang in line for you. You know what ther most of 'em are—they must have their drinkin', an' as lots of 'em have knocked off work jest because this election business has started, some of 'em won't have very much money by Tuesday."

"Well, you do all you can by argument, Quigley. But don't buy a vote for me—not if you can do it for the price of a drink of whiskey. I won't have anything like that. I gave you that money because I have reason to believe you are a truthful man, and I felt that the information you gave was worth something. I would rather you would take the fifty dollars home to your family than to spend it all for drinks."

"That's what I'll do with the biggest part of it if you say so. Forty dollars to the old woman an' ten dollars to have a good time with while I'm tryin' to talk votes for Young Wild West. Whoop! I'm a lucky dog, an' no mistake. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Our friends had a laugh over the fellow's actions, for he certainly had not expected to get fifty dollars for the information he had given Wild.

But, as our hero said, it was valuable information, and he meant to profit by it.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT FRAUD?

Nothing of importance happened on Sunday and Monday, and the morning of Tuesday dawned bright and clear.

This was Election Day, and every flag in town was flying at sunrise.

Spooner had been working hard to offset the damage done him by the written promise he had made to Monte Pete.

And Brown was hustling all the time to add to the list of votes that he felt sure he had corralled.

Young Wild West was not doing a thing to gain votes.

He had made his rounds and called at every house in the town, so that one could not feel slighted, and that was all he could do, he thought.

But he could keep his eyes open and prevent the proposed fraud that was being practiced by Monte Pete.

He meant to see to it that all ballots with the corners creased should not count.

When the polls closed and the count began he meant to openly charge the card sharp with buying votes, and he would be in a position to prove it, too, since after what the

miner had told him he had gone on a still hunt and learned all he wanted about the deal.

As Cheyenne Charlie was one of the inspectors of election, he would have a good man to look after his interests when the count took place.

When the polls opened nearly every candidate on the three tickets was there.

The inspectors drew lots to see who would be the chairman of the board, and it fell to Lew Rollins.

This caused Monte Pete to feel very jubilant.

They thought it would be an easy thing now to work their scheme in changing the hundred ballots.

Rollins would surely have the most to say when the count began.

Jim Dart and Jack Robedee were to remain right at the polling place all day to look after the interests of the Independent party.

Each of the other parties had representatives there, too, and there was bound to be more than one clash before the day was over.

Young Wild West was the twentieth one to vote, and when he heard the number called out, he looked at Cheyenne Charlie and remarked:

"That ought to be a lucky number for me; I am just twenty years old, you know."

"Sure thing," answered the scout. "You jest keep cool an' take things easy, Wild. If some one ain't surprised when ther votes is counted to-night, I'll miss my guess."

"You kin bet your life they'll be," exclaimed Rollins, with a chuckle.

"An' ther ones what will be surprised may be ther ones what ain't expectin' it could be possible," added Joe Lemperle, the other inspector, who knew of the game to buy votes by the People's party gang.

Then all three inspectors laughed.

Rollins, who was quite a shrewd fellow, began to pity his fellow officers of the election for being so innocent.

But Rollins was liable to be a badly fooled man before the votes were counted.

The votes began to come in pretty fast, and by ten o'clock fully one-fourth of them were polled.

The inspectors were kept busy writing down the names of the voters as they deposited their ballots in the box set on a table for the purpose, and they were careful to get every man, so the ballots would count out the same number as the names on the list of those who voted.

As the tickets were distributed outside of the polls by the workers, the inspectors were not bothered by them, any more than to receive them and place them in the box.

Wild had given orders to his friends to keep a sharp watch on Rollins.

There was no telling but that he would substitute ballots for the ones handed to him by the voters.

It was a little before noon when there was quite a rush of men to come in and vote that Jim Dart noticed a hang-dog looking fellow slip a handful of ballots in the pocket of Rollins.

Instantly Jim realized that there was fraud in the air.

"Go out and find Wild," he whispered to Jack. "Hurry up!"

Robedee did not stop to ask any questions, but slipped out of the door like a shot.

He was lucky enough to find the Prince of the Saddle outside talking to Candidate Brown in a good-natured way.

"Jim wants you inside right away," Jack whispered.

"What's the trouble?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I'll soon find out."

Young Wild West was in the polling place in a jiffy.

Jim was right there, keeping a sharp watch on Rollins.

As Wild came to his side he whispered to him about the placing of the ballots in the pocket of the rascally inspector.

Just then a cowboy who was a friend of Wild tendered his ballot to Rollins, who let it slip from his hand and it dropped on the floor.

He reached down as though to pick it up, but placed his hand in his pocket instead and drew out a ballot.

Our friends could not swear that he did this, but Wild happened to be standing so he could see the ballot on the floor, and when the inspector arose with one in his hand he placed his foot on that which had been dropped.

He was just going to push it through the narrow opening in the top of the box when Young Wild West cried in a ringing tone:

"If you drop that ballot in the box I'll drop you dead in your tracks!"

The face of Rollins turned the color of ashes.

"What do you mean by interfering with me in my duties?" he demanded, trying to put on a bold front.

"The ballot you have in your hand is not the one you dropped on the floor," answered the boy. "It is not the one the man gave you. Rollins, if you don't run this election square, you won't run it at all, do you understand that? Your foot is on the ballot the man gave you as his vote."

At this the cowboy promptly dropped upon his knees.

Reaching under the table he pushed the foot of Rollins aside and found the ballot.

"Jumpin' catamounts!" he roared. "This is ther vote I want to go in, all right. It is a straight Independent ticket with Young Wild West at the head of it. Now, then, you onery coyote, jest hand that ticket here what you was goin' to put in ther box for my vote."

The fellow was in deadly earnest, for he had leveled a long-barreled revolver at the head of the inspector.

As this happened a dozen revolvers were drawn in the room.

The followers of all three political parties were there, and they wanted to see fair play.

"Gentlemen!" cried Young Wild West, "just take things coolly. This man demands to see the ballot the inspector was going to deposit in the box as his vote. He has a perfect right to see it, and, by jingo! he is going to see it."

There was a dangerous flash in the handsome dark eyes.

of the young dead-shot when he said this, and Rollins no longer hesitated.

He handed the ballot to the cowboy.

"This is a straight People's ticket!" yelled the voter. "You was goin' to swindle me out of my vote, hey? Well, I reckon I'll fill yer with lead for that!"

He was about to shoot the cheating villain when Wild caught his arm.

"Don't!" he said. "Maybe it will teach him a lesson." Then turning to Rollins, he added:

"Just hand over the tickets you have in your pocket. An inspector should not be allowed to have his pockets stuffed with ballots; it makes it altogether too handy for him to stuff the ballot-box."

Rollins went into his pocket and drew out the bunch Jim had seen given to him, and taking them, Wild held them above his head and remarked:

"Gentlemen, here is the evidence of the first attempted fraud of the day. I have an idea that there will be more of it before the polls close, and I want those interested in the perpetration of it to understand that the undertaker has not been very busy during the last few days, and that he has a fresh supply of boxes on hand. Gentlemen, step outside, and I will throw these ballots to the wind. Before you pick any of them up, I will bet a silver dollar to a buckshot that none of them has my name on them."

As he let the ballots go, the miners and cowboys made a scramble for them.

They picked them all up, and found there was forty-one in the bunch, every one of which were the regular ticket of the People's candidates.

Young Wild West had nothing further to say.

He felt sure that the men who had not voted would do a lot of thinking before they cast one of the ballots, though.

That is, if they were honest and believed in a straight election.

Wild was just going back into the polling place when Brown met him.

"Don't you think we had better fire that inspector out of the board?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know as it will be necessary. He ought to have enough sense to know that he is being watched now, and be mighty careful how he conducts himself. Charlie and Joe Lemperle are both honest, and neither of them would sit and see any crooked work done, no matter who it was for."

"Yes, I believe that's true enough," retorted the Citizen's candidate for mayor. "But they didn't see him cheating; it was you."

"Jim Dart was the first to get on to the crooked work," corrected the boy. "Well, Brown, we will go inside and tell Rollins what he may expect if he is caught doing anything wrong again."

"Tell him he kin resign, if he wants to, or else look out for ther consequences."

"All right. I'll tell him something that will impress him. Come on in."

The two walked inside the barber shop where the polls were being held, and stepping up to Rollins, Young Wild West said:

"See here, my friend, Brown and I have just been talking about you, and we have come to the conclusion that we are willing to give you a chance to resign, if you want to. If you want to stay here and act as an inspector, you can do so, though, providing you act strictly on the square. Neither Brown nor myself want any votes counted for us that do not belong to us, and we are determined that none shall be counted for Spooner that he is not entitled to. Now, then, you can stay or resign, just as you choose."

"I'll stay," answered Rollins, meekly. "I'll act square."

"All right. See that you do. I hope the first election in Weston will pass off peaceably. Over in Deadwood, three or four men are generally shot on Election Day, and we don't want that to happen here, if we can help it. If it does happen you want to look out for yourself, as you will likely to be one of the victims."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," spoke up Rollins, who appeared to be not a little frightened. "I'll resign as chairman of the board."

"Well, perhaps that will be a good idea."

"Well, I resign, gentlemen," and he turned to the other two inspectors. "I suggest that you put Cheyenne Charlie in my place."

"That won't do," said Wild. "I don't want it said that I am trying to run the election. Every one knows that Charlie is a partner of mine, and he must not be the chairman."

"That's right!" exclaimed the scout. "I nominate Joe Lemperle for chairman of ther board."

"Second ther motion," promptly put in Rollins. "All in favor say Aye. Carried!"

Lemperle was supposed to be one of Brown's supporters, and the friends of the hotel man were more than satisfied with the change.

What had happened at the polls was not long in reaching the ears of Spooner, who was over at Bailey's place well under the influence of liquor again.

"If Rollins was tryin' to cheat for me I'm glad he got caught at it," he said. "But I don't believe he was tryin' to cheat."

"Of course he wasn't," observed Bailey. "Young Wild West is doin' ther intimidatin' act. He wants to scare people into votin' for him. I tell you that if he is allowed to have his own way around ther pollin' place he'll win ther election. Spooner, it hadn't ought to be allowed."

"How are you goin' to stop it?" asked Spooner, rubbing his reddened nose in a perplexed manner.

"Somethin's got to happen that will keep him away from ther polls, while ther count is takin' place, especially."

"Well, there ain't to be any killin' done, mind you."

"No. That wouldn't do."

"I'll fix a way to git Young Wild West away from ther polls when ther time comes," spoke up Monte Pete, who was one of the party in the place.

"What'll you do?" asked Spooner.

"Steal his horse an' hide him somewhere, or kidnap his girl," answered the villain. "He'd be so anxious an' excited then that he'd forget all about their election."

"Gee!" cried Bailey, rubbing his hands and nodding in approval. "Pete, you've got a great head on you!"

Spooner looked at the two doubtfully.

"You know what would be apt to happen if Young Wild West found out who done it," he said significantly.

"Oh! it could be brought in as though it was a joke. He'd find their horse, or their gal, just as it might be, but by their time he found 'em their countin' would all be done, an' you'd be elected."

"Well, go ahead an' do it. I s'pose a trick like that ought to be played on him; he's got altogether too much to say around their polls."

"We'll fix it," said Monte Pete. "You just wait, an' there'll be no harm done. I reckon I kin figure out a scheme to do it. Go on out an' hustle for votes, Spooner; we'll do their rest."

Spooner was just about to go out when a man came running in.

"Brown has got another big poster with a copy of that letter on it!" the newcomer exclaimed. "There's a big crowd in front of his place, an' they're hootin' an' howlin' you down like anything."

"Confound him!" muttered the butcher candidate. "But what am I goin' to do about it?"

"Let's start a riot an' burn Brown's place down!" suggested the man who had brought the news.

"No!" thundered Spooner. "I won't have anything like that! I'll let their poster be there an' not notice it. That's their best way. If I git elected, I want it to be done fair, an' that scuttles it!"

"That's their way I like to hear him talk," said a miner to one of his companions. "I was goin' to put in my vote for Brown, but hanged if I don't give it to Spooner now."

A very small trifle will sometimes change a man's vote, it seems.

Spooner's words held the reckless men in check, and when he went out a few minutes later he proceeded to ask every man he met to give him a vote.

He went at it so earnestly that it is just probable that he did not gain enough to offset the effect the finding of the letter to Monte Pete had taken from him.

Even if he did make mistakes, Spooner was perfectly honest.

But Bailey and Monte Pete meant to elect him by stuffing the ballot-box, just the same.

The former went over to vote about the middle of the afternoon and contrived to whisper to Rollins that the hundred ballots must be changed by all means.

The rascally inspector felt very sore over what had happened that morning, and said he would stick to his promise.

He was bound, now, that Young Wild West should not be elected.

He felt that his humble attitude and willingness to turn

the chairmanship over to another had caused them to think he was sincere in his promise to act strictly on the square.

CHAPTER X.

MONTE PETE'S SCHEME WORKS TO PERFECTION.

It was just about five o'clock when Sam Murdock closed the post-office.

Arietta had been there since two, making up the mail that was to go out by the six o'clock train, and she put on her hat now and started for home.

The girl was very much interested in the election that was being held that day, and she felt confident that her handsome young lover would be chosen as mayor of Weston.

She had been thinking all day of how the event should be celebrated, and just as she was getting ready to start for home she had hit upon the idea of preparing a supper at the Murdock house to be in readiness to serve at about ten o'clock.

If Wild was elected he should take the seat of honor and be lionized by those who were lucky enough to be invited to a seat at the table. It would be a little surprise to him.

There were plenty of women to get the supper in readiness, and as they would have nearly five hours to do it, she was sure that it would not be such a mean one, after all.

"I wish I had thought of this before," the girl murmured, as she hurried toward the house, which was a good five minutes' walk from the post-office. "It will be quite a surprise to Wild, as it is not likely that he will bother about getting anything to eat until the votes are counted, anyway, and grandfather can be there and tell him about it. Whether he is elected or not, we can have the supper. But he will be elected, I am sure," and she shook her head decisively.

Arietta had just turned the corner at the bank to take the street leading to her home when a man suddenly called out to her.

She stopped instantly to learn what he wanted.

She knew almost everybody who came into the post-office, but she had never seen this man before.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"You are Miss Murdock, ain't you?" he said, panting as though he had been running.

"Yes," she answered.

"Well, I just went to their post-office after you an' found it was closed. An old man was in front of it, an' he told me to run an' catch you. Young Wild West just got shot an' they think he might be dyin'."

Arietta turned as white as a sheet.

Her young lover shot! The thought was appalling!

"Oh, take me to him!" she cried, the tears welling to her eyes.

"Right over here, miss," and the man pointed to the road that led to Devil Creek, which could just be seen across the wooded stretch in the rear of the bank.

The man started to run in that direction, taking the back way for a short cut, and the agonized girl ran after him.

There was not a soul on the corner at the time this happened, all the male population being gathered at the saloons and around the polling place at the time.

The next minute Arietta had followed the man into a thick group of trees, and then something happened.

Two masked men sprang from behind some bushes and rushed upon them!

Both wore masks, and before the girl could utter a scream a hand was thrust over her mouth by one of them, while the other fell upon her guide as though to kill him.

Then a heavy blanket was wound about the girl, over her head and around her form, so she could not move her hands, and she was carried off, unable to see anything further.

Then the two men who had surprised her started off through the bushes and undergrowth, followed by the man who had led her to the spot, who was no other than Monte Pete.

The villain had been hanging around the post-office for half an hour, waiting for the girl to start for home, as he had been informed that old man Murdock was going to close the office at five.

He had his confederates lying in the bushes, so there was really little difficulty in carrying out the kidnapping game, especially as there had been no one around to see them at the time.

But the card sharp had not counted on making a success of this altogether.

He figured that it was just possible that they would make a miss of getting Wild's sweetheart, so a man had been sent to the vicinity of the stable where the sorrel stallion Young Wild West thought so much of was kept.

And it so happened that both schemes turned out to be successful, as the man was hanging around the bushes in the rear of the stable less than ten minutes before the man-of-all-work employed by Wild and Jim went over to vote, leaving the stable unlocked.

He soon got the horse, and then going in a roundabout way, led him to a deserted cabin about a mile from the center of the town.

And it was to this place where the villains were taking Arietta.

Monte Pete knew it would not be long before they would be found, but he figured that it would be some little time before they would be missed, too, and he wanted it to be known about the time the votes were to be counted.

In about fifteen minutes from the time she was so neatly captured, Arietta was led into the deserted cabin.

This cabin was not only deserted, but it stood upon a claim that was deserted, as well.

Several had tried their luck there, but it had been stated that there had never been an ounce of gold taken from the spot.

This seemed rather strange, as the deposits of ore and dust were thick all around it.

But it had been two or three months since any one had put a pick in the ground there, and though the cabin was in

a pretty good state of repair it had been deserted and left alone for that length of time.

Once inside the place the girl was gagged with her own handkerchief, and a leather belt one of the men had for the purpose, and then her hands were tied behind her and she was tied to one of the logs that formed part of the little building.

All this was done in quick time, the villains not taking very much pains in tying the bonds.

"You needn't be afraid, miss," said one of the masked villains as they turned to leave. "This is only done for a joke on Young Wild West. Here's his horse right here with you, so you won't be lonesome for ther little time it takes him to find you."

Then the two passed out, being careful to shut the door after them.

Monte Pete had not entered the cabin with them, so Arietta had not seen him since the alleged attack had been made upon him.

But she understood the case thoroughly.

He had lured her to the woods with a lie about Wild being shot just on purpose for the masked men to make her a captive.

"Now, then," observed Monte Pete, as the three walked away from the cabin, "we must get back to Bailey's as quick as we kin. We must not go together, either."

The men nodded and took off their masks, putting them in their pockets.

Then a few minutes later they approached the hotel that was the headquarters of Candidate Spooner, singly, and from different directions.

Monte Pete was the first to get in the place.

Bailey looked expectantly at him, and he nodded.

"It is all right, then?" the rascally saloon-keeper said.

"Yes, we've got 'em both," was the reply.

"I know the horse was taken all right. Bill got back ten minutes ago."

"Well, ther girl is there, too. There was no trouble in gittin' her, either. She took right to ther game."

"Well, now, suppose Young Wild West don't find out about it very soon?"

"We've got to make him find it out, if he don't."

"Yes; I guess we'll have to, somehow. Did ther girl see your face?"

"Of course; but she won't remember how I looked; she was too much alarmed over the yarn I give her for that."

"Suppose she does remember you, what then?"

"Well, we will have to git three or four to swear that I was right here at ther time she was fooled so nice."

"Well, if you are willin' to take ther risk, I guess it's all right."

The two lingered until it was within a few minutes of the time when the polls were closed.

When they got to the barber shop they learned that the votes were all in, and that the inspectors were simply waiting till the time was up.

Young Wild West, Brown and Spooner were grouped together near the ballot-box, all three looking confident.

Wild gave the card sharp a searching glance that made him quail when he came in.

The villain edged his way through the crowd till he got to his place opposite where Rollins sat at the other side of a table.

He had the hundred ballots in his pocket, folded, and ready to exchange for a like number that had been voted, when the time came.

And Rollins had his dog under the table, ready to be kicked.

Bailey got into the place he wanted to be in, so he could carry out his part of the scheme.

Just then Joe Lemperle, the chairman of the board of inspectors, got up, and in a loud voice, called out:

"Hear ye! Hear ye! I now declare the polls closed."

That settled it.

The voting was over, and now the count would begin.

Lemperle then calmly proceeded to unlock the ballot-box, and the crowd in the place pushed closer, so they might see and hear.

"Ther first thing to do," observed the chairman, "is to count ther ballots and see if the number corresponds with the number of names we have down on the book."

"That's right," retorted Cheyenne Charlie.

So the three inspectors began counting the votes.

In a few minutes they announced that there were seven hundred and thirty-nine.

This tallied exactly with the number of names on the list, and a sigh of relief went up from more than one man in the room.

Many of them were afraid that there might be a mistake that would delay the counting.

"Gents," suggested Rollins, "I would suggest that each of us take a pile of ther ballots and sort 'em out into piles of three. Then we kin count up ther piles an' find out who has got ther most in short order."

"A good idea," answered Cheyenne Charlie. "But I think it would be a good thing to put all the scratched tickets in a pile, too. I mean them that has been changed with a pencil to suit ther voter, if there be any."

"Certainly," exclaimed Lemperle.

It now being agreed, they set in to sorting them out.

Just then Sam Murdock pushed his way in hurriedly and whispered something in the ear of Young Wild West, the result being that the boy at once went out.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

Wild left the polling place so suddenly that Jim, who was paying strict attention to the counting of the ballots did not see him.

And of course Cheyenne Charlie did not.

He was too busy to even look up from his work.

Jack Robedee and Dove-Eye Dave saw him go out, though.

They quickly left the room to learn what the trouble was for there must certainly be something the matter, or Wild would not have left in such a manner.

Young Wild West and old man Murdock were talking in an excited manner when Jack and Dove-Eye Dave rushed up to them.

"What's ther matter?" asked Robedee. "Anything wrong?"

"Arietta is missing!" Wild answered in a voice that showed he was very much worried.

"She left ther office at five to go home, an' no one has seen her since," answered the girl's grandfather.

Dove-Eye and Robedee were aghast when they heard this.

While the four stood there in a quandary the man who took care of the horses for Wild and Jim came rushing up all out of breath.

"Did you take Spitfire out of ther stable, Mr. West?" he asked.

"Why, no," and the boy looked at him in surprise.

"Well, he's gone. When I got back from votin', only bein' away twenty minutes, ther horse was not in ther stable. Ther door was shut, though, jest as I left it."

"More trouble!" exclaimed Wild, in a voice that showed he was now as cool as ever. "Boys, I am of the opinion that some of my enemies have got to work with a vengeance, Jim, you, Jack and Dove-Eye get into the polling place and watch the count. I am going to find Arietta and Spitfire!"

The old man was about to say something, but the young Prince of the Saddle checked him.

Then he ran off, intending to go to the Murdock house first.

But he had not covered more than a hundred yards when he heard the sounds of galloping hoofs.

The next instant a horse turned the corner at the bank and came toward him.

The light from a neighboring store shone full upon the steed and the person on its back, and when Wild saw them he gave a start, and a cry of joy came from his lips.

It was Arietta riding Spitfire, and she seemed to be in a great hurry.

"Hello, little one!" he called out, running out in the middle of the street. "What is the trouble?"

"Oh, Wild!" she cried, dropping from the back of the horse. "I am so glad I have found you."

"And I am glad I have found you," was the reply. "Your grandfather just told me that you were missing. Then my man comes along and reports that some one had stolen Spitfire. Where have you been, Et? And—what! no saddle or bridle on Spitfire! What does it mean?"

"Well, I was kidnapped on my way home!"

"What!"

"Yes," and then the girl told him just what had happened.

"I was there a good while tied in the corner of the deserted cabin," she said in conclusion. "At last I thought of Spitfire, and the intelligent fellow knew me, I guess, for he moved toward me, and the first thing I knew he was rubbing his nose against me in the darkness. I tried hard to speak to him, but could not. Then I made a great effort to get my hands free, and to my joy I succeeded."

"As quickly as I could I got the gag from my mouth and then untied the halter. Spitfire walked right out of the cabin as gentle as a kitten, and when he was outside he halted and stood there as though waiting for me to mount."

"There was no saddle on him, but I concluded to get on his back, just because he wanted me to, it seemed. I stepped on a stump, after taking the halter in my hand, and he came right up and stood as still as a mouse. You know I can ride without a saddle, Wild, so it was no trouble for me to mount. And then away went Spitfire at a sharp canter, picking his way through the bushes and acting as though he was in a great hurry."

"I had some little difficulty in turning him around the corner up here, for he seemed to be inclined to go straight to the stable. But he came around, and then I headed him straight for the polling place to tell you what had happened. Have they counted the votes yet, Wild?"

"They are counting them now, Et. Say, do you think you would be able to recognize the three men?"

"I might be able to pick out the man who came to me at first. But I would not know the other two, since they wore masks, you know. But don't mind them, Wild. Wait until the votes are counted. I believe it was a trick to get you away from the polls while the count was going on. If it was I am awful glad I was able to get my hands free and get here in time to keep you from starting on a hunt for me. Now, go right back there and see that they do not defraud you of what belongs to you. Please do, Wild! Let the three men be until after you are elected."

"All right, little one. Come right over to the barber shop with me, and I will get your grandfather to take you home. I will see to it that there is a fair count."

Meanwhile things had been progressing smoothly along in the polls.

The three inspectors were sorting over the ballots as rapidly as they could, and just as Young Wild West paused at the open door, after sending old man Murdock home with Aretta, Rollins had the hundred ballots ready to exchange with Monte Pete when the dog was kicked by Bailey.

Everything was working their way, it seemed, and the three villains were confident of being successful in carrying out the villainous scheme.

Wild pushed his way inside and stepped upon a bench, so he could see over the heads of the crowd.

Just at that very moment Bailey gave the dog that was lying under the table a violent kick.

Then Monte Pete let out a yell and all was confusion for a moment.

Rollins slipped the package of a hundred ballots to the

card sharp, and then as Monte Pete reached over to drop the other package on the table a revolver cracked.

Young Wild West had seen the trick.

And a bullet from his revolver shattered the wrist of the card sharp as he was making the exchange.

"Order, gentlemen!" cried the young dead-shot from his place upon the bench. "I shot that man because he was in the act of changing a pile of ballots. He has those that should be counted under his coat. Charlie!"

That was enough.

Cheyenne Charlie made a grab and had the package of ballots in no time.

As soon as the men realized that some one was trying to perpetrate a fraud, a dozen revolvers flashed in the crowd.

"Don't get excited, gentlemen. It is all right. I caught him in time!" and with that Wild forced his way over to Monte Pete and pushed him back against the wall.

Bailey made a move to get out of the place, but Jim Dart had seen him kick the dog for nothing at all, and though he did not know at the time what it was done for, he now realized it.

He simply grabbed the rascally saloon-keeper by the collar with his left hand and pressed the muzzle of his revolver against his temple.

"You get back there, too," he said. "You are the one who started the rumpus."

"And Rollins is the one who handed the ballots to Monte Pete!" cried Wild, in a ringing tone. "Boys, don't shoot him! He has got to finish the count first!"

Rollins was trembling like a leaf.

He did his best to put on a bold front, but made a miserable failure of it.

"These are the ones to be counted," he said, picking the right package. "I was so excited that I did not know what I was doing."

"And these are not the right ones," added Cheyenne Charlie, holding up those that he had picked up from the table as Monte Pete received the bullet in his wrist. "Well, I will put them here on the shelf, and after the count is over we will see what they are."

"Let us see what they are now," demanded Brown. "It is my right to ask this. I am a candidate."

"All right," answered Charlie. "Here, Lemperle, you examine these, while I keep an eye on the ballots we have spread out here."

It took Joe Lemperle more than five minutes to look over the ballots, and when he looked up to announce what they were, a deathly silence pervaded the room.

"There is just a hundred tickets here," he said, "and every one of 'em is headed with the name of Larry Spooner for mayor."

An angry growl come from the majority of those present, but Young Wild West was equal to the occasion.

"Gentlemen," he said. "Keep cool. The count must be finished, or the first thing we know there will be no telling who has been elected, and then another election will have to be held. Proceed with the count, I say."

That did the business.

Rollins, who had calmed a trifle, got right in with the other two inspectors, and in half an hour the count was completed.

Then chairman Joe Lemperle got up to announce the result.

Again there was the utmost silence.

"Voters of Weston," he said, in a clear voice, "we find that there have just been seven hundred and thirty-nine ballots cast at this election. Of these Larry Spooner has received one hundred and seventy-two; Alvin Brown, one hundred and ninety-eight, and Young Wild West, three hundred and sixty-nine! Young Wild West having received the greatest number of votes, the board of inspectors of this election hereby declare him elected to the office of mayor!"

The last was not heard at all, as the friends of Wild made a rush for him, yelling at the top of their voices.

They picked him up bodily and started to carry him outside.

Just then Monte Pete leaped forward with a gleaming knife in his left hand and raised it to plunge it in the back of the young mayor.

It would certainly have been all up with Wild if the eagle eye of Cheyenne Charlie had not seen the act.

Crack!

The scout's revolver cracked and Monte Pete, the card sharp, had played his last card.

Bailey and Rollins stood trembling in a corner.

They were expecting to be the next ones to drop off.

But Young Wild West caught sight of them as he was borne out of the building on the shoulders of the men.

"Don't harm the other two!" he cried. "Let them be till I have had a talk with them to-morrow."

And that saved the lives of the remaining two conspirators.

Brown, who had felt certain that he would be the winner in the three-cornered contest, had caused a platform to be erected against the side of a bank a short distance from his hotel, and he expected to make a speech to the citizens of Weston from it after he had been declared mayor.

It was a big disappointment to him, but he held up under it, and when he saw the shouting throng carrying victorious Young Wild West to his platform, he simply called out:

"Go ahead! I'm a loser, but I ain't no squealer. Hooray for Young Wild West, I say! He can't be beat at anything!"

Those who heard this broke into a cheer and thought more of Brown than they ever had before.

Wild was placed upon the platform, and Cheyenne Charlie lost no time in jumping up to introduce the successful candidate to the crowd which had now gathered into vast proportions.

Hardly one of them heard what Charlie said, but they knew what he was trying to make them hear.

Almost every man was trying to see how loud he could yell; even those who had not voted for the young candidate joined in.

Wild raised his hand for silence.

"Three cheers for the youngest mayor ever elected!" shouted Jim Dart.

Then the crowd broke into a roar that was deafening.

Never had there been such a demonstration in Weston.

In a minute or two he managed to get them into something like silence, and then he made a short speech that was to the point.

What followed can well be imagined by any one who has been out of an election night.

It was past midnight before Young Wild West was allowed to go home, so the little surprise Arietta had intended to prepare for him would have been lost, anyhow.

The next morning the young mayor went over to see Bailey and Rollins.

They made a clean breast of it, and when he told them about the creased ballots, which had not been bothered with, they admitted that, also.

They both promised him to lead better lives in the future, and he agreed to let them off.

Spooner did not show up for three days, but when he did meet Wild, he said:

"Young Wild West, you have learned me ther lesson of my life. While I knew nothing of the conspiracy to elect me by fraud, I did say some mean things during the campaign. But let me tell you that I'm never goin' to drink another drop of whiskey as long as I live! I want you to shoot me right through the heart if you ever catch me doin' it, too. Will you shake hands with ther worst defeated candidate that ever run?"

"I will," answered the young mayor, and he did.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE CATTLE THIEVES; OR, BREAKING UP A 'BAD GANG,'" which will be the next number (30) of "Wild West Weekly."

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